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The Libretto as Literature.  
A Historical and Theoretical Study with  
The Rake's Progress as Illustration.

by

Carolyn Roberts



A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and  
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### ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes an examination of opera libretti from the literary point of view. The first chapter is a historical survey of the libretto from the time of its inception until the present day. Particular emphasis is given to those "reform movements" which have stressed the importance of the words over the music and to the "literarization" of the libretto which is the distinctive feature of libretto-writing in the twentieth century. Chapter Two deals with the question of a poetics of the libretto and of the necessity of understanding librettistic convention. This chapter is devoted primarily to an examination of the various ways in which the libretto's alliance with music influences such literary considerations as subject matter, plot construction, characterization and style. The third chapter studies one libretto in particular, The Rake's Progress by English poet W.H. Auden. This chapter opens with a brief outline of Igor Stravinsky's attitude towards the literary quality of a libretto and towards the issue of artistic convention in general. It is shown how these had an impact both on modern librettistic trends and on the librettistic theories of Auden. The Rake itself is examined primarily in the light of Auden's definition of opera as "pure artifice" and in the course of this study, Auden's relationship to various contemporary philosophical streams of thought, including existentialism, is noted. This thesis is written with the hope that the libretto, as a viable literary form in its own right, will at last receive the critical justice that is its due.



A pound, dear father, is the sum,  
That clears the opera wicket:  
Two lemon gloves, one lemon ice,  
Libretto, and your ticket.

-- from Punch

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## INTRODUCTION

"Ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante," wrote Beaumarchais in Le Barbier de Séville (1775).<sup>1</sup> It is certainly ironic that the writer whose plays were to become the bases of two of the Western world's most beloved operas, The Marriage of Figaro (1786) by Da Ponte and Mozart and The Barber of Seville (1816) by Sterbini and Rossini, should also be responsible for a maxim that has perpetuated one of the most unjust and undeserved judgements in the history of literature.

This is the mistaken notion so prevalent among the opera-loving public, musicologists and literary critics alike that the libretto of an opera is, at best, second-rate literature if, indeed, it is to be considered as literature at all. Many seem to take it for granted that opera libretti are to be treated with indulgence as subgeneric and that it is only the music which allows us, as Boris de Schloezer has written, "de . . . complètement oublier les défauts d'un livret, sa platitude et sa puérilité."<sup>2</sup> Opera critic George Marek shares this sentiment.

"There are good operas the librettos of which could hardly be classed as literature. (But then, they are not supposed to be literature.)"<sup>3</sup>

These statements appear even more startling when placed in a historical perspective. In 1720, Benedetto Marcello, himself a composer, wrote Il teatro alla moda, a scathing satire on the many abuses of early eighteenth-century opera. In his biting "Instruction to Librettists," Marcello ridicules librettists' lack of concern for literary values, ironically advising that "the modern librettist need not worry about

his literary style."<sup>4</sup>

He need not have any command of poetical language, and mythology and history can be closed books to him. To make up for this he will employ in his works as frequently as possible technical terms from the . . . sciences, . . . though they may have no relation whatsoever to the world of Poetry. He should call Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto obscure, clumsy, and dull poets whose works, for that reason, should never, or only very seldom, be used as examples.<sup>5</sup>

The tone in which such "advice" was meant to be taken was clearly set by this opening paragraph:

A writer of operatic librettos, if he wants to be modern, must never have read the Greek and Latin classic authors, nor should he do so in the future. After all, the old Greeks and Romans never read the modern writers.<sup>6</sup>

Incredibly, this anti-literary tendency condemned by Marcello over two and a half centuries ago is still being condoned in some quarters even today. Joseph Kerman, for instance, believes that "the dramatist is the composer"<sup>7</sup> and composer Paul Dukas tells us that "la valeur littéraire n'est point ici la question principale."

Que le poème soit médiocrement littéraire, que le librettiste soit supérieurement poétique, ce n'est pas l'affaire. Le principal est que le poème soit conçu musicalement.<sup>8</sup>

The most consistent mistake made here by these and by others who write about opera is to overestimate the role of the composer at the expense of that of the librettist. This is a common misconception which Patrick J. Smith, author of the first and long overdue history of the libretto, The Tenth Muse (1970), has called the "Pathetic Fallacy of Opera."<sup>9</sup> This "Pathetic Fallacy," he explains, "consists in ascribing to the music qualities that can be found only in the libretto or qualities that cannot be empirically traced to the composer."<sup>10</sup>

Because of this widespread and generally unquestioning belief in the "omniscience of the composer,"<sup>11</sup> "the libretto, as a thing in



itself," noted opera critic and translator Edward J. Dent tells us, "has never received the systematic analytical study which is its due."<sup>12</sup>

This paper is an attempt to correct this imbalance in operatic and literary criticism. I propose to defend the libretto as a viable literary form, thereby exposing the limitations inherent in the "Pathetic Fallacy" attitude towards opera. In order to support this contention, I will present a literary analysis both of libretti in general and then of one libretto in particular, of a work which has often been called the most beautiful libretto of this century, W.H. Auden's and C. Kallman's The Rake's Progress (1951).

Because of its very uniqueness-- the study of the libretto necessarily involves studying the relationships between literature and another art-- the libretto has for centuries been in a critical quandary. Musicians who know little about literature and literary critics who have had no musical training have both failed to do the libretto justice. For this reason, two attitudes towards opera generally prevail, "the one held by musicians, that opera is a low form of music, and the one apparently held by everyone else, that opera is a low form of drama."<sup>13</sup> By examining the libretto as literature, albeit as a literary form in many respects geared to the needs of music, I hope to show that neither of these two points of view is just nor correct. The fact that the libretto is forced to conform to certain conventions due to its union with music in no way lessens its value as a literary genre and, in fact, is responsible for its being in a category of literature all its own.

The libretto is the very foundation upon which an opera is built; the text always comes first. It must be clearly understood from the outset that the writing of the libretto always precedes the writing of

the music. To set words to music already composed is a phenomenally difficult, if not impossible, task.<sup>14</sup> Thus, not only is the libretto the source of the composer's inspiration, more often than not serving, in addition, as the immediate motive for the score's musical structure, but the libretto is also the source of the drama and of the characterization. To perform the music of an opera without its text, without its libretto, would make no sense at all. And furthermore, contrary to common belief, with few exceptions, only those operas with good libretti have stayed in the repertoire permanently. "I defy anyone," writes Rudolf Bing, "to name a truly great opera that has a bad libretto."<sup>15</sup> In short, the libretto is the raison d'être of opera. Anyone who has failed to read and to understand the libretto cannot be said to have understood the opera either. It is my hope that this paper will contribute in some small way to that understanding.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Libretto as Literature: A Historical Survey

The dispute as to whether the text or the music is of greater importance in opera is not a new one and has been waged almost ever since opera was first begun. In fact, the history of opera has been called "a martial history"<sup>1</sup> chronicling the fluctuating critical attitudes towards the relationships between and the relative importance of the words and the music. Generally speaking, the history of the libretto has been that of a series of hard-won reforms aimed at re-establishing literary values in the face of musical excesses.

Those reformers who have argued in favour of the literary point of view have actually always operated with the historical advantage because originally the text of an opera was of far greater importance than the music. The first opera was Jacopo Peri's setting of poet Ottavio Rinuccini's libretto Dafne. It was first performed in 1597, the date now recognized as marking the birth of opera and hence of the libretto as well.<sup>2</sup> Dafne was the result of the neoclassical theories of the Florentine Camerata, a group of artists, including Peri and Rinuccini, who sought to re-vitalize drama by following the practice of the ancient Greeks whose poems and plays, it was believed, were performed to musical accompaniment. Initially, therefore, the music was subservient to the text:

. . . opera was born not from a musical attempt but from a dramatic one. In the beginning at least the play was the thing.<sup>3</sup>

But by the late seventeenth century, the simple recitative invented by the Camerata to heighten the dramatic effect of the spoken line had evolved into the aria, a formal and rigid type of melody-writing intended for sheer vocal display. Typical of this trend were the operas of Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) in whose approximately one hundred and fifty operas, vocal display always came first. Because of this general tendency, the Italian libretti of this period were burdened with pointless repetitions and baroque affectations.

Only in France, with its already well-established tradition of classical theatre, did the text retain its dramatic function and power. Initially, this was largely due to Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), a Florentine established as master of music in the court of Louis XIV, who avoided the florid arias of the Italian school in favour of the recitative and who respected a dramatically convincing unfolding of the plot. Between 1664 and 1671, Lully collaborated with Molière on a number of opera-ballets and the works of Philippe Quinault (1635-1688), Lully's librettist from 1672 until his death, owe much to the great classical tragedies of Corneille and Racine. From their inception, then, the French libretti were of a correspondingly higher literary quality than the Italian. Even today, French opera is still among the most faithful to literary values and a major criterion remains attention to the cadence of the French language.

Nevertheless, the librettist whom many consider the greatest of all time was not a Frenchman but an Italian after all. French ideals did, however, play a considerable part in shaping his aesthetic. The libretti of Metastasio (1698-1782) emerged from the first of the reform periods. Even towards the end of the seventeenth century, there appeared in Italy

a growing dissatisfaction with the elaborate mechanizations and artificial excesses of the baroque opera. The concurrent and growing successes of the French classical drama with its emphasis on the ideals of purity, simplicity and nobility served to incite this dissatisfaction even further. As a result, Italian opera was for a time marked by an attempt to simplify and to return to the Greek-inspired dramatic ideals of the Camerata. This trend was relatively short-lived, but it did last long enough to produce the great libretti of the First Reform.

Metastasio's libretti were written to be read apart from their musical settings as serious dramatic literature and are still being read as such in Italy today. So great was Metastasio's fame as a librettist that Voltaire considered him to be as great a playwright as the ancient Greeks and Racine:

Where can one . . . find a spectacle that furnishes an idea of the Greek stage? Perhaps it is in your [Italian] tragedies, called operas, that its image persists. . . . The Italian recitative is precisely the melopoeia of the ancients. . . . The choruses . . . which are so tightly linked to the plot, resemble the ancient choruses. . . . Add to these similarities the fact that in many of the tragedy-operas authored by the famous Abbé Metastasio the unities of place, action, and time are observed. These pieces, moreover, abound in that expressive poetry and continuous elegance [of diction] which embellish nature without doing violence to it - signs of a talent which, in the modern age, our own Racine and England's Addison were the only ones to possess.<sup>4</sup>

Metastasio's libretti represent the peak of the librettist's power over a composer. For him, the text always came first - it was he who insisted his plays be called drammi per musica - as can be seen from this letter written to Francesco Giovanni di Chastellux in 1766:

If in . . . lyrical theater one represents an action, creates complications of plot, unravels a story, and if there are persons and characters, then the music is in somebody else's house and cannot act the mistress.<sup>5</sup>



Musicians vied for the opportunity to set Metastasio's words to music, hoping thereby to secure their fame. Some of his plays were set as many as seventy times,<sup>6</sup> thus proving that a libretto can sustain many different musical treatments and can be effective in its own right whatever its setting. Metastasio was a giant of the librettistic art and under him the libretto attained an eminence yet to be equalled.

But ironically, even as Metastasio's power as a librettist reached its peak, musical forces were again at work undermining his influence. Once more, singers gained control of the stage, just as they had before him. With flagrant disregard for dramatic continuity, Metastasio's "exit arias" were indiscriminately embellished and the castrati became notorious for their ad libitum attitude towards both text and score.

But now the libretto's supporters rallied for a major and definitive assault. The most influential writer in this field was the Italian philosopher Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764), whose Saggio sopra l'opera in musica (1755) was translated into all the major European languages and quickly "became the manifesto of operatic reform."<sup>7</sup> The principal thrust of Algarotti's treatise was to urge the poet to "'resume the reins of power which have been to unjustly wrested from his hands."<sup>8</sup>

This rallying cry became both "the fundamental impulse . . . and the aesthetic theory"<sup>9</sup> of the Second Reform, a movement of more far-reaching consequences than its predecessor and which was to prove a profound influence on the evolution of the libretto, particularly in the nineteenth century. Poet Ranieri Calzabigi (1714-1795) and composer Christoph Gluck (1714-1787), the two principal architects of the reform, sought to return to the ideals of the Camerata by re-adjusting the balance between the music and the text in favour of the libretto, a platform outlined in

the dedication with which Gluck prefaced their opera, Alceste (1767):

I sought to restrict music to its true function, namely to serve the poetry . . . I thought that it should do for the poem what the vivid colors and the skillfully contrived contrasts of light and shade, which serve to animate the figures without changing their outline, do for a correct and well-proportioned drawing.<sup>10</sup>

Gluck is the text-book case of a rather paradoxical situation not uncommon in the history of the libretto, that of a composer defending the libretto's cause with often more fervour than the writer themselves. Of the two, the one who wrote that the trouble with opera is that it "stinks of music" (puzza di musica)<sup>11</sup> was not Calzabigi but the musician, Gluck!

Fortunately, though, Gluck did find a librettist whose ideals matched his own:

. . . the libretto was admirably suited to my intentions, its famous author having constructed it according to a new dramatic plan. He has replaced the flowery descriptions, superfluous similies and cold and sententious maxims by the language of the heart, by strong passions, interesting situations, and a constantly changing spectacle.<sup>12</sup>

It has been suggested that it was the librettist Calzabigi who originally inspired the reform.<sup>13</sup> But the fact that it is usually attributed to Gluck alone is not the first time that the librettist has been denied the credit that is his due.

Not surprisingly, it was in France where Gluck's and Calzabigi's ideals were most ardently adopted, the efforts of many gluckistes far outshining the masters' in reform spirit. As a result of the Second Reform, of the spectacular success of Federico's and Pergolesi's sqcially explosive La Serva padrona (1733), and of the general pre-revolutionary temper engendered largely by the Encyclopédistes, a new type of libretto appeared in France, libretti "written to serve as didactic tracts and

only secondarily to serve as vehicles for music."<sup>14</sup> The best and most astute of France's literary minds participated in this movement; Voltaire's Samson (1750), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Le Devin du village (1752) and Beaumarchais' Tarare (1787) are all outstanding examples of such livrets à thèse.

Of these, Beaumarchais' Tarare, a topical story of tyranny and révolution, is the most important, for the preface is in itself a major document in the history of the libretto. Entitled, "Aux Abonnés de l'opéra qui voudraient aimer l'opéra," it is one of the most lively and eloquent defenses of the libretto as literature ever written. The "nouveau moyen d'intéresser à l'opéra"<sup>15</sup> to which Beaumarchais refers in his opening paragraph is to recognize the libretto as a distinct literary genre as he has done. He finds it difficult to understand "ce dédain pour le poème d'un opéra" because "enfin ce travail a sa difficulté."<sup>16</sup>

Beaumarchais' aesthetics owe much to the Gluckian reform; nowhere is this more clear than in his ordering of the operatic arts:

La véritable hiérarchie de ces arts devrait, ce semble, ainsi marcher dans l'estime des spectateurs. Premièrement, la pièce ou l'invention du sujet, qui embrasse et comporte la masse de l'intérêt; puis la beauté du poème ou la manière aisée d'en narrer les événements; puis le charme de la musique, qui n'est qu'une expression nouvelle ajoutée au charme des vers; . . .<sup>17</sup>

Beaumarchais had, in fact, originally asked Gluck himself to compose the music to Tarare but the aging composer, feeling too old, suggested his pupil, Salieri, instead.<sup>18</sup>

This tendency towards writing libretti as didactic tracts became particularly pronounced during the revolutionary period between 1789 and 1800. Following the abolishment in 1791 of the state's theatrical monopolies, new, independent theatres emerged and began producing operas

attuned to the current events.<sup>19</sup> In these works, the didactic and moral elements necessarily predominated and as a result, the mélodrame, with its emphasis on spoken dialogue, developed, relegating music to a secondary position. It was a libretto from this revolutionary period, Jean Nicolas Bouilly's Les Deux Journées, a moral tale extolling the revolutionary ideal that "le premier charme de la vie/C'est de servir l'humanité,"<sup>20</sup> which Goethe, in his Conversations with Eckermann praised as a model of libretto-writing:

. . . here the subject is so perfect that, if given as a mere drama, without music, it could be seen with pleasure. Composers either do not understand the importance of a good foundation, or they have not intelligent poets who know how to assist them with good stories.<sup>21</sup>

Goethe was an exponent of the livret à thèse theory (he greatly admired Emanuel Schikaneder's libretto Der Zauberflöte, to which he even wrote a sequel), and doubtless admired Bouilly's libretto for primarily this reason.

However, despite this wide-spread acceptance of Gluck's ideals and despite his good intentions, Gluck in the end only hastened the libretto's decline from the height it had attained during Metastasio's reign. As this letter to the Mercure de France makes perfectly clear, Gluck sought to reinstate the primacy of the words and the drama:

No matter how great the composer's talent may be, he will never compose anything but mediocre music unless the poet excites in him that enthusiasm without which any work of art is feeble and languishing. . . . As far as possible, my music, always simple and natural, aims only at the greatest expression and reinforcement of the declamation and poetry.<sup>22</sup>

Yet paradoxically enough, in actual practice, Gluck accomplished this at the libretto's expense. In seeking to reinforce the meaning of the poetry, he shifted "the focus of attention from the words to the words as defined



by the music."<sup>23</sup> This was eventually to become known as the "romantic" attitude towards opera and was a blow from which it would take the libretto a century to recover. The libretto would have to wait until the mid-nineteenth century before a new wave of reformers, notably Berlioz and Wagner, would return once again to the spirit of Gluck's and, indeed, the Camerata's ideals.

Illustrative of the type of libretti that emerged as a result of Gluck's practical example are those of Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749-1838). Da Ponte's claim to fame is not as a librettist per se, but as Mozart's librettist and this fact alone was to have far-reaching repercussions. When the words as interpreted by the music become more important than the words themselves, the librettist is necessarily relegated to a secondary position. Such was precisely the case with the operas Da Ponte and Mozart produced together. So self-effacing was Da Ponte's attitude towards his composer and so serious were Mozart's intentions in writing opera that critics are quite justified in speaking of the operas' characterizations, for instance, as being not Da Ponte's, but Mozart's. Noted opera critic Donald Grout has written on the subject of The Marriage of Figaro:

No characters in any opera give more strongly the impression of being real persons than do Figaro and Susanna, the Count and Countess, Cherubino, and even the lesser figures of this score. It is therefore important to point out that this vividness of characterization is not due to Da Ponte or Beaumarchais but to Mozart, . . . no one who has read the libretto and then heard the opera will deny that this is so. . . . note how little the words alone tell us about the person, and how much the music.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, regarding characterization, Mozart's music has almost completely taken over what is primarily a literary function. Nowhere in the history of opera have the roles of libretto and music been so completely



reversed. With Da Ponte, the music-oriented "romantic" movement in libretto-writing was well under way; from his time until well into the twentieth century, a librettist would have to achieve his fame through the composer.<sup>25</sup>

Da Ponte was also largely responsible for another development which was to prove a double-edged sword in the history of the libretto. This was the trend towards the librettist as adapter. On the one hand, Da Ponte was a sensitive adapter; his handling of Beaumarchais' The Marriage of Figaro set a high standard for the future and attests to his skill at modifying a work for the operatic stage while at the same time preserving the spirit of the original. And in this sense, Da Ponte, even while contributing to the "romantic" libretto, was foreshadowing the great revival of the literary libretto in the twentieth century. Yet in Da Ponte's case, even this ability to adapt faithfully was merely but another instance of his willingness to play a secondary role vis-à-vis both the composer and the original author. It was this kind of self-effacing attitude which led to generations of librettists contenting themselves with acting the part of the humble and subservient middleman mediating between two more talented men.

In France, the rise of the Napoleonic Empire sounded the death knell of the didactic and "revolutionary" libretto of Beaumarchais and Goethe. The practice of treating the libretto as a separate work of art and as a serious philosophical tract was later to be revived by Richard Wagner but in the meantime, the first half of the nineteenth century would be dominated by the French grand opéra.

The man primarily responsible for the definitive establishment of the romantic grand opéra was, ironically, a librettist, Eugène Scribe

(1791-1861), whose libretti to Auber's La Muette de Portici (1828), Halévy's La Juive (1835) and above all Meyerbeer's Robert le diable (1831) and Les Huguenots (1836) served to fix the type.

As a genre, grand opéra is defined by its epic and historical subjects, taken not from classical antiquity, but from medieval and modern history with particular emphasis on religious issues. Parallels between the libretti of grand opéra and the contemporary literary events can be drawn:

Some parallels in the field of literature may be briefly indicated: the romantic treatment of religious themes by Chateaubriand; the historical novels of Scott and Dumas père; and the romantic dramas of Dumas (Henri III et son cour, 1829) and Victor Hugo (Hernani, 1830; Le Roi s'amuse, 1832; Ruy Blas, 1838; Les Burgraves, 1843).<sup>26</sup>

But above all, grand opéra, as the name suggests, meant spectacle and novelty. Scribe often mixed religion with novelty into some bizarre combinations as in Robert le diable (a precursor of Gounod's Faust), which features a ballet of defrocked nuns risen from the grave.<sup>27</sup> As a result of this over-indulgent preoccupation with spectacle, the literary quality of the libretto suffered correspondingly. The verse and the characterization became of secondary importance to the over-all spectacular effect to which even the music was often subservient. In short, the hierarchy of the arts in grand opéra, where the spectacle and then the music ruled at the top and the libretto languished at the bottom, represents the very opposite of the ordering suggested by Beaumarchais in his preface to Tarare.

In addition, Gluck's suggestion that a librettist adhere to a single storyline was disregarded and dramatic continuity lost amidst the fragmentation of scenes into a series of titillating tableaux. Wagner is quoted

as calling Scribe's grands opéras "a series of effects without causes"<sup>28</sup> and both he and Théophile Gautier<sup>29</sup> strongly objected to the basic shallowness of the grand opéra libretti.

Nevertheless, Scribe's instinct for effective theatre cannot be denied and he had considerable influence on succeeding librettists. His dramatic use of the chorus as an active participant in the action, for instance, prepared the way for Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov. Well into the twentieth century, Scribe was still being quoted as the model for all young librettists to follow, as in one of the rare books on libretto-writing, Edgar Istel's The Art of Writing Opera-Librettos, published in English translation (from the German) in 1922.<sup>30</sup>

In between the romantic grand opéra of Scribe and the great "reform" libretti of Wagner, Boito and Mussorgsky, stands an important transitional figure. This man wrote not only the major French opera of the nineteenth century, but also one of literature's most rewarding libretti, a work of subtlety and complexity<sup>31</sup> which belies forever the notion that literary finesse acts to the detriment of opera as a whole. He is the author of Les Troyens (1856-58), Hector Berlioz (1803-1869).

Like Igor Stravinsky in this century, Berlioz was very much a literary-minded musician. Most of his music, such as the concerto Harold en Italie (after Byron), the symphony Roméo et Juliette, the operatic "symphonic drama" La Damnation de Faust (after Goethe), and the operas Les Troyens (after Vergil's Aeneid) and Béatrice et Bénédict (after Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing), were based on literary works. However, such a list proves little; mere literary borrowing does not guarantee literary quality, as Gounod's lamentable Faust (1859) (libretto by Barbier and Carré) proves.

But Berlioz was much more than a mere borrower of familiar plots. As a rule, he wrote his own libretti, treating the originals with considerable structural freedom-- taking and altering, in the typically "romantic" manner, only those incidents which suited his musical scheme-- yet succeeding in preserving their essence. Writing of La Damnation de Faust Ernest Newman writes:

. . . after all it is only pedantry that would regard most of Berlioz's alterations of Goethe's drama as very serious perversions of the main Faust legend. So long as the central problems of the character are seen and stated, it matters very little through what incidents the composer chooses to bring them home to us. And Berlioz really has a very strong grip upon the inner meaning of the legend.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to his verses being generally considered among the best operatic verses of the nineteenth century, "Berlioz's melodic line is in the best French tradition of utter fidelity to the text."

It contains not a trace of Italian operatic opulence; nothing is brought out merely to gratify the singer or tickle the ear of the listener.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, with respect to his fidelity to both the text and the drama, Berlioz is indeed Gluck's true spiritual successor.

Nevertheless, in spite of his literary leanings and undeniably Gluckian operas, Berlioz was by no means sympathetic to Gluck's theories. Surprising as this may seem, considering how Berlioz needed literary inspiration in order to compose and considering how clearly his operas attest to his literary sensitivity, Berlioz has written:

When Gluck says that the music of a lyrical drama has no other aim but to add to the poetry that which color adds to the design of a painting, I think that he is greatly mistaken.<sup>34</sup>

In a letter to Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, Berlioz expresses relief that Gluck "did not succeed in translating from theory into practice."<sup>35</sup>



We can only echo this sentiment and say it is indeed fortunate that Berlioz did not do so either!

Berlioz is a transitional figure because his actual practice anticipates the future literary trend of the late nineteenth century libretto while his theoretical writings still look back to the past, reiterating the earlier "romantic" belief in the superiority of the music over the text. But with Wagner and the other great nineteenth-century "reformers," theory and practice would once again be united in favour of the words.

English librettist Harold Child has called Wagner "the *Campion* of opera"<sup>36</sup> and there is a great deal of validity to this comparison. In fact, just as *Campion* is known today primarily as a poet, so there is justification for calling Wagner primarily a librettist and a composer only second. Both *Campion* and Wagner wrote their own words and then their own music and, in each case, the poet in them guided the musician:

What becomes clear when Wagner is viewed from the perspective of his librettos is that the dramatic node of the opera - that is, the aspect that may be contained in the music but springs initially from the story - is absolutely controlling.<sup>37</sup>

That the drama must come first and that the music's principal function is to reinforce the meaning of the words is the thesis underlying Wagner's operatic manifesto, *Oper und Drama* (1851):

Let us therefore explain to the musician that every situation of his expression (even to that which is least important) in which the poetical intention is not contained, . . . is superfluous, disturbing and bad.<sup>38</sup>

By reversing "ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante," which Wagner mistakenly attributes to Voltaire, he has a bon mot for the librettist, too, one which should be the motto of all those who aspire to write libretti:

What is not worthy of being sung is also not worthy of being set in poetic terms.<sup>39</sup>



Almost all the innovations which we have come to associate with Wagner were the direct result of his literary concerns. (When building his Bayreuth Festspielhaus, for instance, he went so far as to design a hooded orchestra pit to dampen the sound and insure that all the words be clearly understood.) The Wagnerian Leitmotif, or musical quotation, is essentially a literary technique applied to music. The Leitmotif operates in his operas in much the same way as a reoccurring image does in poetry or prose. Each time a poetic image is repeated, the reader recalls those instances where it was used before until he accumulates a rich complexity of associations. The Leitmotif, argues Joseph Kerman, acts much the same way:

A leitmotive acts like a recurring image, with this difference: that whereas the verbal symbol has some specific meaning, however limited, at its first appearance, the musical symbol has at best mood, and can only absorb conceptual meaning by association. . . . The meaning of a leitmotive is nothing less (or more) than the whole complex of all the associations, dramatic and musical, that attach to its every appearance.<sup>40</sup>

Wagner was also largely responsible for beginning the modern trend towards the durchkomponierte or "through-composed" opera. This type of opera is also known as the "music drama" and is defined as that type of opera:

in which the conventions of opera are given up in favour of a continuously unfolding musical-dramatic work, without divisions into separate numbers.<sup>41</sup>

Prior to Wagner, most operas belonged to the Nummernoper or "number opera" type where the work consists of "a series of self-contained musical numbers."<sup>42</sup> Thus, in contrast, Wagner's durchkomponierte Oper was really opera as sung play, "a literary form of drama continuously supported by music."<sup>43</sup> As such, Wagner's "music dramas" can be seen as a fulfillment of the literary ideals of the Florentine Camerata and also of the

classical ideals of Gluck and Calzabigi.

But most important of all were the contributions Wagner made directly to the libretto itself. Like the best librettists before him, Wagner treated the libretto as a serious art-form, as, in other words, a vehicle for self-expression and philosophical polemics. As a result of the seriousness with which he treated the libretto and of the large number of libretti he wrote over a considerable period of time, Wagner created a body of work which could be "examined as a literary progress. This idea was all but unknown in the history of the libretto"<sup>44</sup> but was to have considerable impact on the attitude of twentieth-century writers who once again began to regard the libretto as a legitimate part of their literary corpus. Here, the most famous example is Hugo von Hofmannsthal but as we shall see, he was by no means an isolated case. Also of great importance in terms of future librettistic developments was Wagner's overwhelming interest in psychological analysis, the subconscious and dream-states. This, too, would revolutionize approaches to the libretto and, by the twentieth century, the libretto would be a medium for psychological portraits of a complexity previously unheard of in opera.

Lately, it has been the fashion to find fault with Wagner and he has, unfortunately, suffered much through his posthumous association with Nazi Germany. However, this should not blind us to his enormous importance as one of the major cultural forces of the past century. In fact, so all-pervasive has his influence been, that we sometimes lose sight of the fact that Wagner's impact on areas as diverse as literature and politics was due first and foremost not to his music or his polemics, but to his libretti.

No man's libretti have been subjected to more critical scrutiny than

Wagner's. Indeed, the very fact that they can support such a body of critical literature itself attests to the artistic maturity the libretto form had attained. And among Wagner's many contributions particularly to the libretto, this was perhaps his greatest. He, through his innovative genius, revealed the power latent in the libretto and thereby raised it once more to the level of an art-form in its own right. With Wagner, the libretto at last came back into its own, this time, hopefully, to stay.

Great though Wagner's influence was, he alone was not responsible for the nineteenth-century renaissance of the libretto. In this respect, one other librettist-composer must be mentioned, Arrigo Boito (1842-1918).

Boito ranks among literature's most accomplished librettists. Although he is now known primarily for his adaptations of Shakespeare for Verdi, he was also a poet in his own right. His collaboration with Verdi lasted a relatively short period of time; the bulk of Boito's energies were directed towards his own literary pursuits, including translations from German, English and French; articles of literary criticism; poetry and his own original libretti, two of which he set to music himself.

It is here, in his own libretti, where we find Boito, considered the leading intellectual of the avant-garde of his day, taking a creative and innovative stand towards the writing of the libretto. For beyond an interest in the literary and the dramatic, Boito had a special concern new to libretto, a concern for its purely verbal texture. In his early opera, Mefistofele (1868), for instance, Boito broke away from the standard librettistic formulas and began experimenting with words, using the resources of language to achieve new and novel effects. The famous and often-quoted example of this is the Chorus of the Cherubini in the superb Prologue to Mefistofele (based on Goethe's Faust), where Boito used

repetitions of the short "i" sound to suggest the light and ethereal nature of the angels:

Siam nimbi volanti dai limbi,  
nei santi splendori vaganti.  
Siam cori di bimbi, d'amori.<sup>45</sup>

P.J. Smith suggests that Boito's literary experiments "derived in one part from his admiration for the verbal fireworks of Hugo, but certainly derived also from his own extremely sensitive musical ear for shading of sound."<sup>46</sup> Whatever the immediate source, such departures from the traditional poetics of the libretto created a sensation and set off a storm of controversy. The opening night of Mefistofele, it might be added, caused a riot.

There can be no doubt that the literary consideration with which Boito approached the libretto accounts, at least in part, for the extraordinary sensitivity of Verdi's settings of Boito's Otello (1887) and Falstaff (1893). Even the most staunchly music-oriented critics agree that Verdi's late operas owe much of their success to the quality of Boito's texts.<sup>47</sup> As if to do particular justice to the text before him, Verdi in Otello actually borrowed an essentially literary technique and applied it to the needs of music. The use of irony in opera-- that is, the writing of music in ironic juxtaposition to the meaning of the text-- has occurred before but rarely so expressively as here in Verdi.

The classic example of this use of irony is found in Act II of Otello, in the final duet between Iago and Otello where Iago tells him of "proof" of Desdemona's infidelity. Had Otello been listening to the orchestra, he would have been warned of Iago's duplicity, for the music is recalling, even as Iago sings, a motif from his earlier "Credo" aria in which he first announced his evil philosophy of life and his intention



to destroy Otello.<sup>48</sup>

Here, then, the music actually adopts literary methods— the repetition of a motif for the purposes of ironic commentary. In the true Gluckian sense, the music reinforces the meaning of the words, literally underscoring Iago's treachery and heightening the irony of Otello's fatal mistake. It is also ironic in another sense. In that Otello cannot, of course, really listen to warnings from the orchestra, this repetition of a motif reminds us that we are not witnessing reality but listening to an opera and hence it serves to remind us of artistic conventions in much the same way as the "alienation effect" of another major librettist, Bertolt Brecht, was to do half a century later. Verdi's late operas have often been compared to Wagner's; in that they both consciously applied literary methods to music, this comparison is certainly justified.

Because of their adventurous attitudes towards libretto-writing and the overall high quality of their verse, both Wagner and Boito did a great deal to broaden the concept of the poetics of the libretto. This was an important anticipation of developments in the twentieth century, which would see an unprecedented respect for the style and general literary quality of the libretto and a recognition of its potential as a legitimate vehicle for literary experiment as, for instance, in the libretto of Gertrude Stein and, more recently, Michel Butor. It is evident even from a general historical survey of the libretto that it has always had a close connection to the literary movements of its time. In the twentieth century, this tendency would become even more pronounced; the libretto would become an integral part of the work of some of the most innovative avant-garde artists of our age.

The twentieth-century libretto began auspiciously in 1902 with Claude



Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande, a work which occupies a pivotal point in the history of the libretto, summing up the best of the past and foreshadowing the best that was to come. Pelléas is the word-for-word setting of Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist drama and as such fulfills the nineteenth-century ideal of opera as a sung play. The transference intact of a play onto the operatic stage was a considerable innovation and introduced a new element into libretto-writing, beginning the minor but nonetheless significant trend towards the play-as-libretto. Outstanding examples of this are Richard Strauss' setting in 1905 of Oscar Wilde's unexpurgated Salomé in a German translation by Hedwig Lachmann, Alban Berg's Wozzeck (1925), a word-for-word setting of Georg Büchner's drama Woyzeck (1836) and Ralph Vaughan Williams' setting intact of Synge's tragedy, Riders to the Sea, in 1937.

It has been suggested that Debussy's libretto, being also Maeterlinck's play, "seems to obviate the necessity of a separate form."<sup>49</sup> But this is emphatically not and never will be so; libretti such as Debussy's and Berg's are isolated and unusual cases. Very few plays as they stand are also libretti; by far the vast majority must be adapted to meet the demands of the new form.

On the contrary, Pelléas actually stimulated further interest in the possibilities of the libretto as a literary art. Debussy's use of Maeterlinck's play intact not only illustrated the possibility of fulfilling Wagner's aesthetic ideals of "the primacy of the story and its meanings and the use of music to heighten, define and expand the words"<sup>50</sup> without necessarily writing Wagnerian music but was a monument to the rewards of the traditional French insistence on clear and faithful adherence to the text. As such, Pelléas immediately set the tone for much of the libretto

writing in this century. Few librettos would preserve the original intact but most would be characterized by a conscientious respect for literary values. Indeed, it is this that is one of the distinguishing marks of the modern libretto.

In France at the turn of the century, another event occurred attesting to increasing interest in the libretto as a viable literary form. This was the appearance of libretti by Emile Zola who, during the last decade of his life, "developed an ardent attachment to the operatic form."<sup>51</sup> Between the years 1893 and 1902, Zola wrote six libretti, three of which, Messidor (1897), L'Ouragan (1901) and L'Enfant Roi (1902), were set to music by Zola's close friend, Alfred Bruneau, and subsequently performed in Paris.

Zola's libretti have been undeservedly neglected, perhaps because in constructing them, he often departed from the famous naturalism of the Rougan-Macquart novels to experiment "with different styles and moods"<sup>52</sup> including, as in Violaine la chevelue, the use of fantasy and allegory. But the very uniqueness of his libretti should only increase our interest in them; Zola is one of the most underrated French librettists, but he is also one of the best.

While acknowledging Wagner's contributions to the libretto, Zola objected to his mysticism ("j'ai horreur de ce mysticisme wagnérien"),<sup>53</sup> and believed that the legendary and symbolic aspects of Wagner's libretti should be used as "a point of departure for greater humanization of the characters"<sup>54</sup> and for the expression of messages of immediate social significance:

. . . tout mon sang de Latin se révolte contre ces brumes perverses du Nord et ne veut que des héros humains de lumière et de vérité.<sup>55</sup>

How artfully Zola could combine these various disparate elements is illustrated by Messidor, the title of which is itself symbolic, being both the name of the French Revolutionary Calendar month for harvest (that is, the opposite of Germinal), and a play on the word for "gold," a central symbol here.<sup>56</sup> Telling the story of the advent of industrialization to a small gold-washing village in the Pyrenees, Messidor combines legend (the myth of a Cathedral of Gold, depicted in the ballet sequence, "La Légende de l'or") with symbolism (a magic gold necklace "symbolizing the Gold of Beauty and of Tenderness"<sup>57</sup>), to produce a drama preaching a clear social message. True to Zola's wont, Messidor denounces the evils of industrial exploitation and as such, belongs to the livret à thèse tradition of Beaumarchais and Goethe. But more significantly, it foreshadows librettistic developments to come:

. . . its progeny, in terms of the attack on the injustices of the ruling class, is not French but the Marxist-oriented work of Bertolt Brecht.<sup>58</sup>

Zola's libretti invariably invite comparison with those by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the most famous librettist in the history of twentieth-century letters. Like Zola, Hofmannsthal, too, worked with only one composer, in this case Richard Strauss, writing for him, again like Zola, only six libretti: Elektra (1909), Der Rosenkavalier (1911), Ariadne auf Naxos (1912), Die Frau ohne Schatten (1919), Die ägyptische Helene (1928) and Arabella (1933). But here, however, similarities between the two partnerships end. Whereas Zola and Bruneau were close friends sharing the same ideals, Hofmannsthal and Strauss were personally incompatible. The two rarely met and conducted their collaboration primarily through the mail.

But ultimately, this very incompatibility served the libretto's

cause far better than Zola's and Bruneau's concord ever did. Not only did it leave the future student of the libretto their exhaustive correspondence, an invaluable record of the problems and solutions encountered when a librettist and a composer work together to create a Gesamtkunstwerk, but it proved conclusively that two artists need not think along identical lines in order to produce opera and that two autonomous arts can operate simultaneously, each on an equal footing.

In other words, Hofmannsthal's most important contribution to the libretto was to refute, by his own example, the notion prevalent since Da Ponte that the librettist must necessarily be subordinate to the composer. Unlike the self-effacing Da Ponte or the compliant Scribe, Hofmannsthal refused to play a secondary role vis-à-vis his composer, thereby doing the libretto an incalculable service. He demanded and got a particular kind of collaboration, "'poetry-cum-music,' not merely the provision of frames for musical compositions" and insisted "that Strauss should respond to the poetry and respect its quality."<sup>59</sup>

Not since Metastasio has the libretto enjoyed such pre-eminence. As with Metastasio's libretti, Hofmannsthal's, too, are read as a continuing body of literature in their own right and even literary critics habitually study them in relation to his non-operatic plays, particularly to those which he wrote concurrently, such as Jedermann (1911), Die Schwierige (1918) and Der Turm (1925, revised 1927). Michael Hamburger writes that Hofmannsthal's "operas and ballets can be appreciated only in the light of his other works"<sup>60</sup> and speaking of Der Rosenkavalier, notes that the discipline demanded by the libretto form "scarcely detracted from the literary merits of the libretto" but actually "proved a distinct advantage."<sup>61</sup> These are important observations for a literary critic to make and are an



indication of the growing respect accorded in literary circles to the libretto as an art form in its own right, a respect, it might be added, which professional literary scholars, as opposed to the creative writers themselves, have been slow to acknowledge.

Hofmannsthal's libretti have proved a formidable challenge for other writers, a challenge successfully answered in the libretti of, notably, Bertolt Brecht and W.H. Auden. Auden, for one, has specifically recognized this debt to Hofmannsthal. Together with Chester Kallman and composer Hans Werner Henze, he has prefaced his libretto, Elegy for Young Lovers (1961), with a dedication to the father of the modern, the literary, libretto, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Master Librettist."<sup>62</sup>

The impetus Debussy, Zola and Hofmannsthal provided towards a consideration of literary values did not establish set formulas so much an ideal. This explains why the distinctively literary cast of the twentieth-century libretto has taken and is continuing to take so many different forms. While the number of libretti written thus far into the twentieth century is not large, especially when compared to the voluminous production of centuries previous, nevertheless, the modern libretto is characterized by an unprecedented richness in variety of styles and approaches. With regard to literary considerations, four major trends may be discerned. Broadly speaking, they may be classified as Repetition, Neoclassicism, Adaption and Origination.

There are, inevitably, those libretti which repeat unchanged the traditional formulas of the nineteenth-century romantic school of Scribe and his successors. To this category belong Gian Carlo Menotti's important but essentially anachronistic and sentimental libretti, including The Medium (1946), The Telephone (1947), The Consul (1950) and The Saint of

Bleecker Street (1954). These are undoubtedly skillfully written and theatrical dramas, the work of a man who in terms of his lifelong commitment to the form deserves to inherit the title of professional librettist. Yet they are essentially holdovers from the early nineteenth century, continuing the romantic tradition of the libretto and upholding the superiority of the music over the words. Speaking of his own libretti, Menotti has said that if they "seem alive or powerful in performance, then the music must share that distinction. . . . We have . . . no single example of a successful opera whose main strength is the libretto."<sup>63</sup> Menotti's works do deal with contemporary subjects but even in this respect they are the direct descendents of the melodramatic verismo libretti written for Puccini to whose music, in addition, Menotti's own is often compared. As Noel Coward has pointed out, the major drawback of such works "is not that opera isn't what it used to be, but that it is."<sup>64</sup>

Other writers have taken a more innovative approach towards the past. These writers have been deliberately anachronistic but even while seeking to revive outdated librettistic styles and subjects have succeeded in turning them towards the thoroughly modern. The Faust theme has been particularly well served here. Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), looking back beyond Barbier and Carré's maudlin "adaption" of Goethe's Faust for Gounod, returned instead to the Spiess Urfaustbuch (1587) as the basis of his libretto Doktor Faustus (1925). In this respect, Busoni's libretto merits comparison with the greatest modern version of the Faust legend, Thomas Mann's Musikroman, Doktor Faustus (1947).

More recently, Michel Butor, advocate of the nouveau roman, has taken a more avant-garde approach to Faust. His libretto, Votre Faust (1969), the title of which is a play on that of Paul Valéry's Mon

Faust (1946), is, as the title suggests, designed to involve the audience in the production. Butor has written one Act I but several versions of Acts II and III. At one point the audience is asked to vote on which way the action is to go, whereupon the libretto proceeds accordingly. Butor even suggests that the work be played backwards, calling the libretto a "fantaisie variable, genre opéra."

Another major writer who has worked within the context of "conscious archaism"<sup>65</sup> has been poet W.H. Auden whose contributions will be mentioned only briefly here as they will be discussed in greater detail later. In addition to translating, with Chester Kallman, Da Ponte's Don Giovanni and Schikaneder's The Magic Flute, Auden has written a deliberately "Mozartean" libretto for Igor Stravinsky, The Rake's Progress (1951), and several libretti for German composer Hans Werner Henze, including an updating of Euripedes' The Bacchae, The Bassarids (1966).

The Bassarids is significant as one of the more recent contributions to an important movement in the twentieth-century libretto, Neoclassicism, used here in the narrower sense of a renewed interest in the creative revival of Greek and Roman drama. Ever since its inception, the libretto has shown an affinity for classical subjects but it has not been until this century that the original ideals of the Florentine Camerata have received such a thoroughgoing application. Elektra (1909) marks not only the first enterprise in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's famous collaboration with Strauss but also the first of many neoclassical libretti by some of this century's best writers. The libretti for Orestie, a trilogy (1913-24), by Darius Milhaud were provided by Paul Claudel. In 1924, Hofmannsthal wrote Alkestis after Euripedes for Egon Wellesz. In 1927 appeared two libretti by Jean Cocteau, the one, Oedipus Rex, for Stravinsky and the other, Antigone,

for Arthur Honegger. Stravinsky later collaborated on another neoclassical opera, Perséphone (1934), libretto by André Gide. Ernest Kr̥enek's opera Orpheus und Eurydike (1926) is based on Oskar Kokoschka's Expressionist play; Kr̥enek later wrote his own libretto for Das Leben des Orest (1930). Using several sources, including Livy and Ovid, English poet Ronald Duncan wrote the libretto for Benjamin Britten's The Rape of Lucretia (1946).

Neoclassicism of this type, in which the author uses Greek and Roman legends often as vehicles for commentary on twentieth-century issues, is closely related to a similar movement in twentieth-century letters, of which T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, Joyce's Ulysses, Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra, Sartre's Les Mouches, Camus' Le Mythe de Sisyphe and Elisabeth Langgässer's Die märkische Argonautenfahrt are the most conspicuous examples. As in literature in general, Neoclassicism in the libretto is not the slavish imitation of an earlier art; the manner in which the classical plays and myths have been handled varies as widely as do the orientations of the many writers and librettists who have participated here.

The librettistic revival of classical drama is also a part of the larger trend towards adapting literary texts to the libretto form. The practice of the librettist as adapter begun by Da Ponte and followed widely in the nineteenth century has continued with great success in the twentieth. Nineteenth-century adaptations tended to treat the originals with considerable freedom, giving greater priority to musical than literary factors; in La Damnation de Faust, for example, Berlioz takes his Faust to Hungary merely because he "wished to composer a piece of instrumental music whose theme is Hungarian."<sup>66</sup> But in the twentieth-century adaption, scrupulous attention is paid to rendering, as far as possible, the spirit, if not also



the letter, of the original. American composer Douglas Moore, explaining how he and his librettist Ethan Ayer transformed Henry James' The Wings of the Dove (1961) into a libretto, says they recognized that "much of the quality of the novel comes from James' literary style . . . the Jamesian vocabulary and phrase"<sup>67</sup> and so they tried to preserve this quality as far as the demands of good theatre would allow:

. . . Mr. Ayer has been singularly successful in reproducing the flavor of the James dialogue without mystifying the listener. He underlined every speech recorded in the novel, and when we came to the pertinent situation he would use as much of the original as seemed possible.<sup>68</sup>

In adapting Thomas Mann's short novel Der Tod in Venedig (1913) into his libretto Death in Venice (1973), Myfanwy Piper provides an even more recent example of this same technique, having translated whole sentences of Mann's prose into English and incorporated them entire into his text.

Whereas very few composers aside from Wagner and Menotti have ventured to create their own original texts, a considerable number have followed the example of Boito and Mussorgsky and have written their own adaptations. As critic Kurt Honolka has observed, "wer immer heute als Komponist einigermaßen wortgewandt ist, sucht sich seine Opernbücher selbst zu verferigen."<sup>69</sup>

Outstanding in this context and also a part of a long-standing Russian tradition to base libretti on works of high literary quality are the libretti of Sergej Prokofiev (1891-1953). Prokofiev's adaptations for his own operas include The Gambler (1929) from Dostoyevsky, The Love for Three Oranges (1921) after Carlo Gozzi's comedy (1761), The Duenna (1946) from Richard Sheridan's drama (1775), War and Peace (1955) after Tolstoy, and several other works based on novels by various Soviet writers, including the "socialist realist" Semyon Kotko (1940). Another

major adapter-composer is Austrian Gottfried von Einem who, aided by fellow composer Boris Blacher, turned works by Büchner and Kafka into libretti for his Dantons Tod (1947) and Der Prozess (1953) respectively.

This phenomenon of the composer as adapter amounts to a tacit demonstration of the general inability of the musical mind acting alone to initiate the unique type of creative thought necessary to the writing of an original book. The very fact that these and other composers, including Janáček and Dallapiccola, tend to adapt stories of recognized literary merit rather than risk writing their own attests to the necessity of a writer's skill in a libretto's creation and construction. This, in turn, constitutes a recognition, by musicians themselves, of the artistic autonomy of the libretto performing functions which neither the musician nor the music alone can provide.

This observation is confirmed by no less than E.T.A. Hoffmann who was not only one of the leading novelists of German Romanticism but a composer (he wrote ten operas), and an astute music critic as well. In "The Poet and the Composer" (1816), Hoffmann has this composer, Ludwig, say the following when asked why he does not write his own libretto:

I admit that my imagination is lively enough to give birth to many a successful operatic plot. . . . As far as the ability to remember them distinctly and write them down is concerned, however, I am afraid that I do not possess it. And how can you expect us composers to acquire, in order to versify our librettos, the mechanical skill needed in every art and presupposing constant endeavor and continuous practice?<sup>70</sup>

The composer who "einigermassen wortgewandt ist" aside, most adaptations are still the work of professional writers. Authors of note who have participated here include Stefan Zweig who in 1935 adapted Ben Jonson's Epicoene (1609) into the libretto Die schweigsame Frau for Richard Strauss. Unfortunately, any further collaboration between the two men was forbidden

by the Nazis and so Strauss turned to Austrian writer Joseph Gregor, who wrote three libretti for him, Friedenstag (1938), Daphne (1938) and Die Liebe der Danae (1938-40), the latter from a partly completed sketch by Hofmannsthal.

But of greater interest from the literary point of view are those libretti which are not adaptations but original books. As one would expect, the French have made many significant contributions here. Swiss-French writer Charles F. Ramuz provided the libretto to Stravinsky's L'Histoire du soldat (1918). Paul Claudel has written two major original books for opera, Christophe Colomb (1930), set to music by his close friend Darius Milhaud, and Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher (1936), music by Honegger. An amusing and surrealist libretto, Les Mamelles de Tirésias (1945), the story of a man who produces forty thousand children after he and his wife change sexes, was set by Francis Poulenc and was the work of Guillaume Apollinaire.

But probably the most important writer in this respect has been Jean Cocteau. For many years he was the spokesman for the group of French musicians known as Les Six, publishing in 1918 a short work which was to become their manifesto, Le Coq et l'Arlequin. United in a common revolt against the vagueness of impressionism ("un poète a toujours trop de mots dans son vocabulaire, . . . un musicien trop de notes sur son clavier"),<sup>71</sup> Cocteau and Les Six collaborated on many musico-literary projects. Cocteau wrote scenarios for two ballet-comedies by Milhaud, Le Boeuf sur le toit (1919) and Le Train bleu (1924); five of the six wrote music to Cocteau's farce Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel; in 1958 he provided the text to Francis Poulenc's La Voix humaine.

Another writer who, "like Cocteau, . . . had a strong influence on

the form, orchestration and general approach adopted by his collaborators"<sup>73</sup>, was Bertolt Brecht. His libretti Die Dreigroschenoper (1928), Happy End (1929), Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny (1930) and Der Jasager (1930), a translation via English of a Japanese Nō play, constitute a major contribution to the librettistic art on a par with the best practitioners of the form. Like Zola and Hofmannsthal, Brecht, too, worked primarily with one composer, Kurt Weill, although he later collaborated with others, such as Paul Dessau, who set his Das Verhör des Lukullus in 1951.

Brecht's work may be further examined in relation to Cocteau's in that Le Coq et l'Arlequin, as the first expression of the new concept of anti-theatrical theatre ("the café-concert is often pure, the theater is always corrupt"),<sup>74</sup> was the precursor of the idea of Epic Opera which was "brought to its perfection both in practice and theory"<sup>75</sup> by Brecht. The idea of Epic Opera, which we can call the librettistic equivalent of Brecht's theory of Epic Theater, is, like the latter, based on the Epic principle of the separation of dramatic ingredients one from another. Brecht explains the relation of Epic Theater to Epic Opera in his notes to Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny:

The intrusion of the methods of the epic theatre in opera leads mainly to a radical separation of the elements. The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and action (which always brings up the question "which is the pretext for what?": is the music the pretext for the events on stage, or are these the pretext for the music? etc.) can be resolved by the radical separation of the elements. . . Music, Words and Setting Had to Acquire More Independence.<sup>76</sup>

What this programme did, in effect, was give the text artistic autonomy, relating music to the position of merely another dramatic device, or, to use Brechtian terminology, to the position of another "retarding factor."

Music here becomes a kind of punctuation, an underlining of the words, a well-aimed comment giving the gist of the action of the text. And this remains its prime function in all Brecht's plays.<sup>77</sup>



Brecht's relation to the libretto as literature tradition is surely self-evident (aside from the undeniable literary quality of his plays, he specifically advocates "a Literarisierung of the theater"),<sup>78</sup> and his relation to the livret à thèse tradition of Beaumarchais and Zola was briefly mentioned in another context. But even more important than these, is the distinction Brecht shares with Cocteau. In that Cocteau's polemics and Brecht's libretti both directly influenced the very compositional techniques of their musical collaborators,<sup>79</sup> their work marks a watershed in the history of the relations between the text and the music. This was a total about-face from the romantic, music-oriented approach to opera; this was Neoclassicism in its most precise librettistic sense, a revival of the Camerata's ideals where the text determines the music.

The work of another librettist indicates an even further removal from the aesthetics of the romantic libretto. In the libretti of Gertrude Stein, the word-play becomes of such overwhelming interest that "the musical forces might almost be dispensed with."<sup>80</sup> In utter contradiction of Menotti's observation quoted above, here are works in which the main strength is indeed the libretto.

Gertrude Stein has written several libretti, included in Operas and Plays (1932) and later in Last Operas and Plays (1949), the two most famous of which are the "abstract libretti" Four Saints in Three Acts (1927) and The Mother of Us All (1946), both set by Virgil Thomson. Four Saints in Three Acts, linguistically the more adventurous of the two, is a landmark of the libretto form and explores the use of language largely freed of meaning:

Saint Chaves. And roses very well. Very well and roses very well roses smell roses smell and very well and very well as roses smell roses smell very well. If hedge roses are moss roses larger. If moss roses are larger are there questions of how very well there are

strangers who have to be known by their walk.  
In a minute.<sup>81</sup>

A celebration of saints, particularly Saint Therese, Four Saints in Three Acts has no form, logic or dramatic action because:

. . . A saint a real saint never does anything, a martyr does something but a really good saint does nothing and so I wanted to have Four Saints that did nothing and I wrote the Four Saints in Three Acts and they did nothing and that was everything.<sup>82</sup>

The Mother of Us All is closer to the conventional libretto in that it does have a central theme, the suffragette movement in America, and a central character, Susan B. Anthony. However, it consists of episodic scenes introducing various personalities from American history and is written in Stein's typically unconventional style:

Yes women have the vote, all my long life of strength and strife, all my long life, women have it, they can vote, every man and every woman have the vote, the word male is not there any more, that is to say, that is to say.<sup>83</sup>

Stein's libretti are the most extreme of the avant-garde experiments with the libretto yet written and their success is a demonstration of the independence, vitality and artistic maturity which the twentieth-century libretto has attained. It is now, as Ulrich Weisstein, ardent defender of the libretto as literature has pointed out, the task of literary scholars to give the libretto the critical justice and recognition it deserves:

Considering the wealth of operating material hidden in the world's libraries, a disproportionately small amount of scholarship has, so far, gone into its critical evaluation. It seems especially desirable that the "ancillary" genre of the libretto should receive fairer treatment both with regard to its dramatic and its poetic qualities, for the serious critical attempts to deal with this stepchild of literature are few and far between. All the greater is the challenge posed for the literary critic of the libretto.<sup>84</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### Towards a Poetics of the Libretto

The hopes which Beaumarchais expressed for the libretto were of the highest order. His observation to the effect that "nothing is capable of being well set to music, that is not nonsense,"<sup>1</sup> was not a prescription but a reproach, for it was precisely from nonsense which Beaumarchais wished to see the libretto liberated. Proposing his own Tarare as a model, Beaumarchais believed the libretto capable of supporting the most serious philosophical speculations, a faith which future librettistic developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have certainly proven to be justified:

Ah! si l'on pouvait couronner l'ouvrage d'une grande idée philosophique, même en faire naître le sujet! Je dis qu'un tel amusement ne serait pas sans fruit que tous les bons esprits nous sauraient gré de ce travail. . . . Peut-être irait-il même jusqu'à encourager des hommes d'un plus fort génie à se jeter dans la carrière, et à lui présenter un nouveau genre de plaisir digne de la première nation du monde.<sup>2</sup>

But Beaumarchais concluded his preface to Tarare with an even more optimistic hope; he envisioned the wide-spread adoption of his principles and the writing of a poetics of the libretto:

Posons une saine doctrine; joignons un exemple au précepte, et tâchons d'entraîner les suffrages par l'heureux concours de tous deux.

Puissent les bons esprits de la littérature adopter mes principes et faire mieux que moi! Mes amis savent bien si j'en serai jaloux ou si j'irai les embrasser. Oui, je le ferai de grand coeur, heureux, ô mes contemporains, d'avoir au champ de vos plaisirs pu tracer un léger sillon que d'autres vont fertiliser!<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the former, however, this vision has not yet come to fruition.

Although the libretto had many literary supporters prior to Beaumarchais, no one had undertaken this august task. One writer whom we would expect to have done so was dramatist, librettist and critic John Dryden. Like Beaumarchais, Dryden, too, believed that "la musique d'un opéra n'est, . . . qu'un nouvel art d'embellir la parole;"<sup>4</sup> in the preface to his libretto Albion and Albanus (1685), Dryden wrote:

. . . it is my part to invent, and the musician's to humour that invention. I may be counselled, and will always follow my friend's advice where I find it reasonable, but will never part with the power of the militia.<sup>5</sup>

But unlike Beaumarchais, Dryden was reluctant to reveal how his libretto had been written:

If I thought it convenient, I could here discover some rules which I have given to myself in the writing of an opera in general, and of this opera in particular; but I consider that the effect would only be to have my own performance measured by the laws I gave; and consequently, to set up some little judges, who, not understanding thoroughly, would be sure to fall upon the faults, and not to acknowledge any of the beauties; an hard measure, which I have often found from false critics. Here, therefore, if they will criticize, they shall do it out of their own fond; . . .<sup>6</sup>

It is to be regretted that the author of "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668) did not write its librettistic equivalent, for lacking all guidelines, critics have indeed been forced to judge the libretto "out of their own fond." As it stands, probably the only document before Beaumarchais' which came closest to fulfilling the requirements of a poetics of the libretto was Marcello's Il Teatro alla moda (1720) but as a satire, telling librettists what to avoid instead of what to emulate, it was more a poetics in reverse.

If the period during which the text was considered more important



than the music did not produce a poetics of the libretto, then we would be ill advised to look for one during the grand opéra period of the early nineteenth century which followed. And, not surprisingly, the reluctance to speak of the libretto in specific terms displayed by Dryden did reach its height during the time of the romantic music-oriented approach. Nowhere was this unwillingness more clearly expressed than in the operatic criticism of Stendhal.

Stendhal's book Vie de Rossini (1824) has been called "a Romantic poetics of opera in disguise"<sup>7</sup> and rightly so, for just as Gluck had passionately championed the cause of the libretto, so Stendhal just as zealously allied himself with those working against it. More anti-librettistic statements than Stendhal's are not to be found because he went so far as to advocate that the libretto of an opera need not even be read:

. . . I am concerned with the music, never with the words, which, to tell the truth, I do not know. It is my invariable habit to rewrite the words of any opera for my own satisfaction. I take the plot which the librettist has invented, and I require further from him one word, and one only, to give me the key to the mood of the scene. . . . Ideally, of course, the answer would be to have had Voltaire or Beaumarchais compose the libretto; in which case it would be as delightful as the music, and never a breath of disenchantment in the reading of it! But happily (since Voltaires are rare in our imperfect world), the delightful art which is our present study can well continue without the services of a great poet . . . provided always that one avoids the sinful indiscretion of reading the libretto.<sup>8</sup>

Stendhal is the other side of the paradoxical situation noted above in relation to Gluck; it has often been the case that the composer defends the libretto with far more enthusiasm than the writer. Perhaps this is so because composers, as artists working with a medium which conveys no concrete or demonstrative meaning, realize their limitations and recognize

the value in opera of a solid literary foundation whereas writers, who work with language, a medium used every day in all spheres of human endeavor, have a tendency to scorn any text which they suspect may serve any purpose, be it journalistic, political or musical, other than literature's own. But for whatever the reason, Stendhal emphatically took the music's side, arguing that the mind can perceive on only one level at a time and that this being the case, in opera the literary level must be sacrificed in favour of the musical. Every moment spent in appreciating literary finesse, Stendhal wrote, "is just so much time lost for the appreciation of the music."

To enjoy the finesse of verbal wit requires critical penetration at an intellectual level; but critical penetration is the very faculty which must be jettisoned for good and all if we are to allow music to weave its elusive web of dreams about our soul; the two pleasures of sense and intellect are distinct, and the belief that both can be enjoyed at once, a dangerous hallucination. Nobody, save a French literary critic, could stubbornly persist in this illusion, . . . .<sup>9</sup>

It is worthwhile pointing out here that there was indeed a time when opera and the libretto were the domain of literary critics. The professional music critic, after all, is a very recent phenomenon; the father of musical journalism was Eduard Hanslick who wrote for the Neue Freie Presse (Vienna) from 1864 onwards.<sup>10</sup> Thus, at the time when Stendhal was writing, music critics were in fact literary critics who regarded the music in opera as insignificant and who habitually judged opera in terms of its libretto. The most notable of these literary critics was Julien-Louis Geoffroy (1743-1814) who was drama critic for the influential periodical, Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires, of which Chateaubriand was also once the editor.

In writing his Vie de Rossini, therefore, Stendhal was at one and the

same time reacting against and participating in this critical tradition. As Richard Coe has remarked, Stendhal, despite his harsh words for literary critics and as a littérateur himself, was not so far removed from this literary tradition as it might at first appear:

It is notorious that he [Stendhal] was incapable of appreciating any music unless it was associated with a verbal text: in other words, he had no notion of the dramatic powers inherent in musical form as such; he needed a literary source of drama (the libretto) before he could begin to appreciate the music.<sup>11</sup>

That is to say, the very fact that Stendhal turned to opera, rather than to, say, the symphony, is an indication of opera's inherently literary appeal, an interest it owes to its libretto.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that no French literary critic, or any other for that matter, has responded to Beaumarchais' exhortation "poisons une saine doctrine" and so after over three hundred years since the birth of opera, there is still no code for the guidance of a librettist.

This has not been without its effect on the libretto. Although many libretti of high literary quality have been written without such a guide, the absence of one has undoubtedly contributed to the fact that a high percentage of libretti are undeniably literary failures, a situation which has fostered the misconception that all libretti are so. English poet and librettist, Ronald Duncan, deploring the absence of a librettistic code, records that "many composers have complained to me that established poets and playwrights with whom they have tried to collaborate have failed to understand their needs."

I know that Stravinsky once received a libretto for an opera which, if he had set every word of it, would have made the entire Ring look as brief as a curtainraiser. That, I suppose, is why many composers have been driven to write their own libretti and often have made a mess of it.<sup>12</sup>

But even more serious than this, the want of a poetics of the libretto has prevented literary critics from giving those many libretti worthy of the name literature the critical justice that is their due. It is a near impossible task for a literary critic to judge fairly the merits of a libretto if he has no frame of reference, no knowledge, in other words, of librettistic convention, by which to measure the extent of the librettist's achievement. A convention is, after all, defined as a rule that

. . . by implicit agreement between a writer and some of his readers (or of his audience) allows him certain freedoms in, and imposes certain restrictions upon, his treatment of style, structure, and theme and enables these readers to interpret his work correctly.<sup>13</sup>

Without this tacit understanding between a writer and his audience, there can be no meaningful critical evaluation.

If a convention which is supposed to be agreed upon by both artist and audience is understood by only the former, then there arises a misunderstanding of the sort made by, for instance, Tolstoy in his treatise "What is Art?" (1898). Here, Tolstoy dismissed opera categorically through his unwillingness (albeit for reasons of his own which are too far beyond the scope of this paper to be discussed here) to accept his half of the implied contract which a comprehension of opera and the libretto requires. After attending the rehearsal of a new opera in Moscow, Tolstoy observed:

That there never were, or could be, such Indians, and that they were not only unlike Indians, but that what they were doing was unlike anything on earth except other operas, [italics mine] was beyond all manner of doubt; that people do not converse in such a way as recitative, and do not place themselves at fixed distances, in a quartet, waving their arms to express their emotions; that, nowhere, except in theaters, [italics mine] do people walk about in such a manner, in pairs, with tinfoil



halberds and in slippers; that no one ever gets angry in such a way, or is affected in such a way, or laughs in such a way, or cries in such a way; and that no one on earth can be moved by such performances; all this is beyond the possibility of doubt.<sup>14</sup>

But watching an opera or reading its libretto calls for the same "willing suspension of disbelief" demanded by not only all literary forms but by all the arts in general. But this is precisely what Tolstoy, when he wrote that ". . . one of the chief conditions of artistic creation is the complete freedom of the artist from every kind of preconceived demand,"<sup>15</sup> chose to ignore and from this arose his unsympathetic attitude towards both opera and its libretto. "It is well to remind the denunciators of the libretto," wrote Ulrich Weisstein, "that the spoken drama itself is based on a number of highly artificial conventions."<sup>16</sup> If, in other words, when we read Shakespeare's Hamlet or Racine's Phèdre, we are willing to accept such impossibilities as the supposition that the customary speech of the Danes was English blank verse or that that of the ancient Greeks was French rhymed alexandrines, then when reading a libretto we must accept the natural language of the characters of this play as being song, and be prepared to accept also all the librettistic conventions that accrue from this. This, to quote Coleridge again, is what "constitutes poetic faith."<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps it is because of the libretto's alliance with music that no such poetics has yet been written; as a verbal structure, the libretto demands literary analysis but as a text written to be combined with music, it requires, in alliance with the former, consideration of musical factors as well. This calls for what Morton Demmery has called "a hybrid critic bred from musical and literary experience and training."<sup>18</sup> Nothing that "the recent phenomenal opera crop" of the latter part of this century

gives "ground for supposing that musical and literary men are regaining that mutual respect" that characterized their relations in Elizabethan England when "the musician could respect the subtlety of poetic effect and the poet not decry the crudity of musical effect,"<sup>19</sup> Demmery concludes:

If I.A. Richards is the literary critic with a knowledge of psychology, the present state of music with words calls for a literary critic with a knowledge of the science of sound.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that Demmery stresses that this "hybrid critic" must be fundamentally a literary one. As it has already been noted above, the reasons for this are partly historical since "our hybrid critic can look to his elders only on the literary side of the fence because the musicians do not, until much more recently, appear to have been articulate."<sup>21</sup> But more important than historical precedent, is the question of the artist's medium:

Poetry, after all, relies for its force on being a part of the world of articulate ideas. . . . Our hybrid critic . . . must be trained in and able to deal with articulate ideas. That really is the core of this article.<sup>22</sup>

But there is yet another reason why our "hybrid critic" must be basically a literary one. The conventions unique to the libretto are, to be sure, those initially imposed by the anticipation of musical accompaniment but, nevertheless, it is not to be supposed that these conventions are any the less literary because of this. The original impetus for librettistic conventions may have been musical but the factors they govern are verbal and hence the province of literary analysis. Music, for instance, demands that sentences or, at least, their component phrases, be short. Friedrich Dürrenmatt's libretto, The Visit of the Old Lady (1970), provides a clear if somewhat extreme example of this convention:

Chorus:

The foundry on Sunshine Square has laid its men off.

Living all the time on unemployment money.  
 And on poor relief soup.  
 Living?  
 Vegetating.  
 And rotting.  
 The whole town of Gullen.<sup>23</sup>

A judgement of the skill with which Dürrenmatt in this instance has used language both within the confines of the libretto form and within the context of the play as a whole is properly the domain of not the musical but the literary critic.

"The writing of a libretto," says librettist Duncan, "is, of course, a technique like any other" and one which can be learned.<sup>24</sup> Edgar Istel, author of the one book which comes closest to a guide for the librettist,

The Art of Writing Opera-Librettos (1922) concurs:

Between the joyful discovery of an operatic subject and its definitive adaptation for composition there is a long road to travel, and this road leads, first of all, through the territory of substantial, workmanlike technic, such as all great dramatists from Shakespeare to Richard Wagner have possessed. . . . Technic . . . must be systematically practised in the outset in certain elementary concepts; . . . Great art-works can be created only by the reciprocal action of knowledge and imagination, never by imagination or knowledge alone. And hardly any other branch of art is so dependent on this reciprocal action, as the musical drama. . . . victory can be won only by a work whose raw material has been shaped by the hand of a master who has all technical devices at command.<sup>25</sup>

But what are these "technical devices" which a librettist must have at his command? One dissenting voice, librettist Christopher Hassall (Troilus and Cressida, 1954), has suggested there are none! Taking the opposite stand from his compatriot Duncan, Hassall writes:

The main trouble in a librettist's life is not so much that there is no text-book on his craft but that there never can be one. Surely there's no such thing as a good libretto in the abstract, though a particular text on a particular theme devised for a particular musician may prove itself in the event to have been a good one. All the values in this art are disconcertingly relative. There

are no principles. . . . As a librettist he will be always breaking new ground and feeling the lack of experience. If there are any first principles at all they are the elementary rules that govern the making of any dramatic work, . . .<sup>26</sup>

While there is, no doubt, truth in Hassall's observation that there is no one way of writing a libretto-- if this were so we would not have librettistic successes as diverse as Metastasio's and Stein's and the libretto would not deserve the distinction of being called an art--, nevertheless, Hassall is mistaken when he asserts that in this art, there are no principles beyond those governing any other dramatic work.

Like Hassall, Duncan and Istel acknowledge that a libretto "rests, for the most part, upon the same constructive foundations as the spoken drama," but unlike Hassall, they go one step further and recognize that, in addition to this, there are requirements unique to the libretto alone. These are the conventions "necessitated by the alliance with music"<sup>27</sup> and will be discussed here as they influence such literary considerations as subject matter, plot construction, characterization and style.

The good librettistic subject has been defined by contemporary music critic R.G. Pauly as "one in which the essential inner and outer action involves the kinds of emotional situations that can be well and convincingly expressed through music."<sup>28</sup> Composer Douglas Moore agrees; the difficulty, he says, with writing a libretto is finding a subject that can accommodate "the inevitable distortion that comes from singing rather than speaking the lines."<sup>29</sup>

If, then, the good subject for a libretto is one which lends itself to musical treatment, precisely what situations are capable of supporting the distortion of which Moore speaks? Saint-Evremond (1613-1703), writing



within a century of opera's birth, was one of the first to write specifically on this topic. He was a staunch defender of the literary over the musical in opera, believing that the ideal is "de laisser l'autorité principale au Poëte pour la direction de la Pièce."

Il faut que la Musique soit faite pour les Vers, bien plus que les Vers pour la Musique. C'est au Musicien à suivre l'ordre du Poëte, . . . 30

But, nonetheless, he provided a rather narrow definition of those situations to which a librettist can avail himself:

. . . il y a des choses qui doivent être chantées, il y en a qui peuvent l'être sans choquer la Bienséance ni la Raison. Les Voeux, les Prières, les Sacrifices, et généralement tout ce qui regarde le service des Dieux, s'est chanté dans toutes les Nations et dans tous les Temps: les Passions tendres et douloureuses s'expriment naturellement par une espèce de Chant: l'expression d'un Amour que l'on sent naître, l'irrésolution d'une Ame combattue de divers mouvements, sont des matières propres pour les Stances, et les Stances le sont assez pour le Chant. Personne n'ignore qu'on avoit introduit des Chœurs sur le théâtre des Grecs; et il faut avouer qu'ils pourroient être introduits avec autant de raison sur les nôtres. Voilà quel est le partage du Chant, à mon avis. Tout ce qui est de la conversation et de la conférence, tout ce qui regarde les intrigues et les affaires, ce qui appartient au conseil et à l'action, est propre aux Comédiens qui recitent, et ridicule dans la bouche des Musiciens qui le chantent. 31

Since Saint-Evremond, most writers on the libretto have taken this same line, maintaining with him that only that which can be sung without offending propriety and reason is open to a librettist. To most, this has meant only one thing: throughout the history of opera, it has been generally believed that the best librettistic subjects are those based upon the ancient myths or those dealing with the world of fantasy or historical legend. Thus, the convention regarding a libretto's subject has traditionally been very strict.

One of the earliest and clearest explanations of the rationale

behind this convention can be found in Francesco Algarotti's Saggio sopra l'opera in musica (1754). Believing that "the first thing to be carefully considered is the nature of the subject . . . of the libretto, which is more important than is commonly assumed,"<sup>32</sup> Algarotti outlines the difficulties posed by the choice of various subjects and then concludes:

The poet can conquer these difficulties only by choosing the subject of his libretto with the greatest care. And in order to carry out his intention, namely to move the heart, delight the eye, and charm the ear, without offending reason, he should take his plot from events remote in time, or at least in place, that furnish occasion for marvelous happenings while at the same time being extremely simple and well-known. The remoteness of the action will make the musical setting less improbable. The marvelousness will permit the poet to introduce ballets, choruses, and all sorts of other embellishments. The simplicity and notoriety, finally, will save him the trouble of having to give lengthy introductions concerning the characters and circumstances. Thus he is free to concentrate on the passions, which are the mainspring and soul of drama.<sup>33</sup>

In this context, Algarotti singles out for praise the libretti of Metastasio and the opera Montezuma (1755) with music by Carl Heinrich Graun (for whom Algarotti also wrote several libretti), and with a libretto based on a plot outline by Frederick the Great himself.

Dictums akin to these by Saint-Evremond and Algarotti can be found at every period in the course of librettistic history and this fact alone goes a long way towards explaining the libretto's general proclivity for classical subjects and for adaptations based on familiar literary works and stories. In "The Poet and the Composer" (1816), for example, E.T.A. Hoffmann, too, perpetuated this librettistic convention by maintaining that the "dramatic fairy tales" of Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi (1720-1786) meet "all the conditions I have set for the librettist. And it is incomprehensible to me why this rich treasure of operatic subjects has not been used more frequently."<sup>34</sup>

Only the inspired poet is capable of writing a truly Romantic opera. For he alone can infuse life into the strange apparitions from the spirit realm. . . . It is, in one word, the magic power of poetic truth which the poet who depicts the marvelous must have at his disposal. . . . In opera, my dear friend, the intervention of supernatural powers must be made visible.<sup>35</sup>

Hoffmann's recommendation of Gozzi's fables not only reiterates the librettistic convention of the past but it also anticipates a major development in the future, for this century in particular has witnessed a veritable revival of Gozzi's plays, significantly in the form of opera libretti. Notable here are Turandot (1917) by Busoni (and Turandot, 1924, by Puccini, Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni), Prokofiev's Love for Three Oranges (1919) and Hans Werner Henze's König Hirsch (1956) on a text by Heinz von Cramer. Hofmannsthal, incidentally, also used names and incidents from Gozzi's Turandotte (1862) in his own fantastic and allegorical fairy tale, Die Frau ohne Schatten (1919).

Hoffmann's recommendation is, however, paradoxical, for while he recognized the potential of Gozzi's fantastic tales as libretti, he never recognized the potential of his own. Instead of composing music to his own libretti, Hoffmann adapted others' as, for example, Goethe's Scherz, List und Rache in 1801, or relied on someone else's opera-text. His most successful musical work, the opera Undine (1816), a setting of a story both written and adapted by F. de La Motte-Fouqué, falls into the latter category. It throws all of Hoffmann's operatic work into an ironic light, for this story of the love between a water nymph and a mortal was a romantic fairy-tale of precisely the type of which Hoffmann was himself the master.

Although Hoffmann never thought to write an opera based on his own

marvelous tales, a cause for great regret among students of literature, opera and the libretto alike, others have not been guilty of the same oversight. Excellent libretti, including Barbier's libretto for Offenbach's Les Contes d'Hoffmann (1880), Busoni's Die Brautwahl (1912) and Hindemith's and Ferdinand Lion's Cardillac (1926), from Hoffmann's short story, Das Fraulein von Scuderi (1818), have been based on Hoffmann's work. While they, for the most part, belong to the twentieth-century trend towards the "literarization" of the libretto, they participate primarily in the traditional librettistic convention by reaffirming the libretto's continuing affinity for fantastic subjects.

This position has continued to find supporters right up until the present day. Librettist Eric Crozier, writing in the journal Composer in 1966, states that "opera is a heroic medium"<sup>36</sup> to which a dramatist turns when he seeks to express "the more enduring truths that are enshrined in myth and historical event and the struggles of legendary figures."<sup>37</sup> Although, as Crozier points out, most libretti written in English since 1945 adhere to this convention of portraying the historical or fanciful or mythological, this is certainly not true for all twentieth-century libretti. On the contrary, this century has seen some daringly innovative departures from the dictates of librettistic convention. Two libretti are outstanding in this context: Clemens Krauss' libretto Capriccio (1942) for Richard Strauss and Menotti's The Consul (1950).

Capriccio in particular is of special interest to students of musico-literary relations in general for it is a dramatization of the age-old argument which has much occupied us here-- in opera, which should take priority, the words or the music? The libretto leaves the question unresolved; in the end, the countess who represents opera cannot choose



between her two suitors, one a poet, the other a musician. But the lively play of ideas and personalities makes Capriccio one of the most entertaining and topical libretti of our century and, as such, it marks a major breakthrough in the history of libretto-writing by categorically refuting Saint-Evremond's statement that "tout ce qui est de la conversation et de la conference" is bound to fail when the subject of a libretto.

Similarly, Menotti's The Consul just as emphatically breaks with librettistic convention and disproves Saint-Evremond's thesis. Already established as one of the most popular operas written since the Second World War, The Consul takes place in an unspecified European country and is the story of the frustrations and, ultimately, the tragedy that destroys those caught at the mercy of an unrelenting and impersonal official bureaucracy. Thus, the libretto is primarily concerned with Magda Sorel's fruitless vigil in the office of the Consul where she fills out endless reams of forms while waiting in vain for the one, all-important document. That this world of questionnaires, regulations, red-tape and bureaucrats can be made into a moving and impassioned, though somewhat melodramatic, play, proves Saint-Evremond's notion that all that is intrigue and business transactions sounds ridiculous in the mouth of singers to be equally fallacious.

From the standpoint of subject matter, then, the libretti of Krauss and Menotti, and others like them, are actually far more innovative than those of, for instance, Gertrude Stein, whose libretti preserved the mythical character of librettistic convention. However, her innovations lay not in her choice of subject matter but in her original approach towards construction, characterization and style, three areas which have, unfortunately, received

very little of the attention accorded to the former.

Writing to Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1908, Richard Strauss paid him this compliment:

You are the born librettist-- the greatest compliment to my mind, since I consider it much more difficult to write a good operatic text than a fine play.<sup>38</sup>

Turning in the same letter to a discussion of Hofmannsthal's proposal that his Casanova comedy (Christinas Heimreise) be made into a libretto, Strauss continued:

. . . I regard the subject matter as too meagre and too thin for a spoken play. It is the born operatic text.<sup>39</sup>

There is no inconsistency between these two apparently contradictory statements. At first glance, it might seem inconceivable that the "thinner" text could be the more difficult to write but this is, in fact, the case, for Strauss has here hit upon one of the most exacting demands of the libretto form, that is, brevity and concision.

Brevity, it can be said, is one of those "distortions that comes from singing" of which Moore spoke earlier and is due to the fact that the pace of singing, and of music generally, is so very much slower than that of the spoken language. Lacking language's ability to express precise meaning, music takes a considerably longer time to express the same emotion that in language could be conveyed with a few judiciously-chosen words; music will, as Istel cautions, prolong any prolixity to at least three times its original length.<sup>40</sup> As a result, a libretto must be correspondingly shorter than an ordinary drama of roughly the same duration. "It is terrifying how short the libretto for Tristan is, for instance, and how long it takes to perform," observed

Hofmannsthal.<sup>41</sup> The poet Ferdinand in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Poet and

the Composer" voiced a similar complaint:

Your remarks remind me of a difficulty with which you face the librettist. It is the incredible brevity you prescribe. . . . For everything must be settled in a few lines which, in addition, have to submit to the ruthless treatment you inflict upon them.<sup>42</sup>

In writing a libretto, then, the librettist must present his story in its most concentrated form; the art of omission becomes one of the cornerstones of the librettist's craft. "Brevity," writes Christopher Hassall, "is the soul of operatic wit."<sup>43</sup> It requires considerable literary skill to write so that when the libretto is studied

. . . as a play apart from the music the words of an operatic scene should not give the impression of a complete but absurdly short scene so much as a very long one compressed to its base essentials.<sup>44</sup>

This is by no means an ideal within the grasp of all writers and certainly not within the range of those ignorant of the demands of this form.

Again in his correspondence with Strauss, Hofmannsthal outlines in greater detail some of the difficulties and challenges that the conscientious librettist must be prepared to face:

My chief difficulty is this: in aiming at compression I must not go too far, or else I shall impoverish the subject; the characters would lose their charm . . . they would look stylized and the whole thing would become trivially operatic. So I must all the time strike the exact balance between too much and too little. If I were to allow myself to think of this libretto being set to music in Wagner's ponderous and turgid andante, I could not do it at all, for the opera would last seven hours-- it is the recollection of Rosenkavalier which keeps me going. The libretto will not, I hope, be very much longer, and a little longer-- given such abundance of material, so varied an action, colourful in every sense, and profound . . .<sup>45</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that Strauss believed it more difficult to be a good librettist than a good playwright. Nor is it surprising that the number of master librettists is, comparatively speaking, so much smaller,

a situation which throws those achievements of the librettists who have succeeded into relief and makes their accomplishments only so much the greater.

Again unlike the ordinary spoken play, the libretto is usually episodic in construction. Such episodes as choruses, dance numbers, spectacular stage effects (processions and the like), and instrumental or vocal interludes, which would be distracting and out of place in the spoken drama, are perfectly at home within the framework of the libretto. Although it can be an integral part of the development of the action, even the reflective and lyrical aria, which in the libretto is equivalent to the soliloquy of the ordinary play, often has the same effect of interrupting the dramatic pace. Because of this, the librettist must devise other, counterbalancing techniques which will serve to maintain, during these relatively static moments, the flow necessary to good theatre. Here, the most effective weapon in the librettist's arsenal is the judicious manipulation of stage movement.

For this reason, the scenes of the conventional libretto are short and, as in the dramas of the early French classical period, they change each time a character enters or leaves the stage. An example of a modern libretto constructed very clearly in precisely this way is W.H. Auden's and C. Kallman's Elegy for Young Lovers. Act I, for instance, consists of eleven scenes, Act II of thirteen, and Act III of nine, the length of these scenes varying from twelve lines to several pages. A librettist is well advised to be very specific, as Auden has been, about the comings and goings of his various characters on and off the stage, for such movements do much to give impetus to the action, to dove-tail one episode smoothly and neatly into the next, and to offset



the music's above-mentioned tendency to slow down the pace of the plot.

But at the same time, the librettist must be careful to maintain a firm control over such stage movements and be certain that they do in fact serve to create dramatic continuity rather than obscure it. It must be kept firmly in mind that in a libretto, physical movement must always be expressive of the dramatic meaning. To achieve this, the librettist must pay particularly close attention to the visual element of his drama. "Let him visualize his work," wrote Istel, "that is, let him continually bear in mind that whatever he creates has not only to be heard, but, above all, to be seen."<sup>46</sup> This attention to the clarity of stage movement is of greater importance to the librettist than to the ordinary dramatist. Because, as Stendhal has observed, there is so much happening simultaneously in opera-- it is, after all, an amalgam of the visual, musical and literary arts--, it is imperative to the audience's understanding of the work that all the action should be as clear to the eye as it is, ideally, to the ear. "Then first and most vital requirement of the musical drama is," continues Istel, "that it bear the test of sight."<sup>47</sup>

In this respect, there is considerable truth in librettist Harold Child's suggestion that "the plot of an opera libretto should lean towards the plot of a ballet and be such that the main action may be at least roughly guessed through the eye."<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note here that several librettists and opera composers have been apprenticed for opera in ballet. Hofmannsthal, for instance, wrote a large number of dance libretti throughout his career; the first work he submitted to Strauss was, in fact, a ballet libretto, Der Triumph der Zeit.<sup>49</sup> He also wrote ballet libretti for Diaghilev, thus sharing a point in common with the subject of our next chapter, Igor Stravinsky, who, as it is well known,

wrote many famous ballets before turning to opera and The Rake's Progress.

Many librettists have sought to minimize this necessity for painstaking attention to visual detail demanded by the libretto form by resorting to the re-telling of already familiar stories and here, then, is yet a further explanation for the libretto's affinity for adaptations. But even here, the best librettists have still used stage movement to "give a complete visual diagram of the dramatic situation, both the physical action and the changing psychological relationships among the characters."<sup>50</sup> The correspondence between Hofmannsthal and Strauss contains many illuminating discussions about such telling uses of stage direction and Verdi, too, in his letters to his librettists, was fond of instructing them, even with the aid of diagrams, on the dramatic possibilities of such matters.

Verdi's one librettist who needed no such instruction was Arrigo Boito. Again in Otello, we see how Boito conceived his scenes visually, taking into account what would be seen as well as what would be heard. In the following excerpt from early in the drama, he counterpoints pantomime with Iago's recitative, using the words as an ironic commentary on the action taking place silently and innocently beyond the glass doors:

Desdemona and Emilia are seen to enter the garden. Iago goes towards the colonnade, beyond which Cassio has taken his position.

IAGO. (calling gently to Cassio)

Take care, Cassio! to her! this is the moment.  
Now haste thee, Desdemona comes.

Cassio goes to Desdemona, bows to her and joins her.

He greets her, does accost her. Now must I fetch Othello.  
Divinities of hell, I call upon your succour!

Cassio and Desdemona are seen passing backwards and forwards in the garden.

They are talking in whispers. Now  
 To him has she inclined her gentle visage.  
 Ay! smile upon her, do! an excellent courtesy.  
 This smile shall lure Othello to his ruin.  
 To work! and in this web I will enslave him.

He goes rapidly towards the door, but suddenly stops.

He comes. Good luck! I have him.

He leans motionless against a column looking intently towards the garden where Cassio and Desdemona are standing together.<sup>51</sup>

A good librettist, then, must be as much a man of the theatre as a poet, for stage practice has had a considerable impact on the conventions of librettistic construction. Here, the vagaries of singers have been decisive, too; one reason why attention to clarity of physical movement has become so major a consideration is that often in performance, the text suffers losses due to poor or faulty enunciation. Hoffmann's composer had some words to say on this subject as well:

It is obvious that the librettist has to follow the appropriate dramatic rules concerning the arrangement and economy of the whole. But he must be doubly careful to arrange the scenes in such a way that the action unfolds clearly and distinctly before the eyes of the audience. For even while barely able to comprehend the text, the spectator must be in a position to reconstruct the action from what happens on stage. No other dramatic poem is so much in need of lucidity, since . . . the music itself tends to distract the listener's attention, so that it must be constantly directed toward the point of the greatest dramatic effect and concentration.<sup>52</sup>

It is worthwhile noting that the most enthusiastic supporters of the literary half of opera have made the demand for clear diction on the part of singers and important part of their platforms. Beaumarchais is no exception:

Deux maximes fort courtes ont composé, dans nos répétitions, ma doctrine pour ce théâtre. A nos acteurs pleins de bonne volonté je n'ai proposé qu'un précepte: PRONONCEZ BIEN. Au premier orchestre du monde, j'ai dit seulement ces deux mots: APAISEZ-VOUS. . . . Messieurs, on entend tout au spectacle où l'on parle, et l'on n'entendrait rien au spectacle où

l'on chante! Oubliez-vous qu'ici chanter n'est que parler plus fort, plus harmonieusement? Oui donc vous assourdit l'oreille? est-ce l'empatement des voix ou le trop grand bruit de l'orchestre? Prononcez bien, apaisez-vous, sont pour l'orchestre et les acteurs le premier remède à ce mal.<sup>53</sup>

Richard Strauss, too, is a major figure here. His respect for the libretto has already been amply demonstrated but nowhere is it more firmly expressed than in his preface to Intermezzo (1924), an opera based on an incident in Strauss' own life and to which the composer himself wrote the words. In this preface, Strauss announced his programme of operatic reform, declaring that it was his aim to compose in such a way as would guarantee that every subtle turn in the libretto be clearly understood:

... the listener must be able to follow the natural flow of the conversation without interruption and must be able to follow clearly all the subtle variations in the development of the characters as portrayed in the opera; if he fails to do so, the performance will have the effect of intolerable tedium since the listener, inadequately understanding the text, will not be able to comprehend the plot in all its details, nor will the musically trained ear find sufficient compensation in symphonic orgies.

No praise pleases me more than when after I have conducted Elektra somebody says to me: "Tonight I understood every word": if this is not the case you may safely assume that the orchestral score was not played in the manner exactly prescribed by me.<sup>54</sup>

Strauss' preface is symptomatic of the literary trends in the opera and libretti of our century. Indeed, as a manifesto to the artistic integrity of the libretto, it is the modern equivalent of Beaumarchais' own.

The process of characterization is basically no different in a libretto than in any other good drama; here, as in all literary productions, the extent to which a fictional character is vivid and convincing depends upon the talent, sensitivity and literary skill of the individual librettist. If the characters of a particular libretto are stereotyped and flat, then



it is the fault of the writer and not the result of any limitation inherent in the form itself.

Nevertheless, there are some considerations peculiar to the libretto which must be mentioned. Because of the dual necessity for brevity and clarity, qualities that are never to be equated with naivety or simple-mindedness, the same condensation of material required in the construction of the librettistic plot applies to the characterization as well. This is not to say that character is to be revealed in any special way (although some will argue that character should be clearly established from the very outset and delineated throughout with broader strokes than is usual in drama), but that the number of characters singing major roles should be kept to a minimum. "Chief rule," writes Istel: "as few characters as any way possible, and limitation of the persons taking an active part to the lowest figure."<sup>55</sup> This is to say that when writing an adaption, for instance, eliminate all those secondary characters who contribute the least to the work as a whole.

The aspiring librettist is warned, however, not to be over-zealous here. Barbier and Carré, in adapting Goethe's Faust for Gounod, eliminated so much they destroyed the entire purport of the original. Boito, on the other hand, in seeking to avoid Scylla, fell prey to Charybdis; his libretto Mefistofele, into which he tried to force both parts of Goethe's poem, including the Helena episode, can be read as a testament to the need for judicious cuts and, as such, is an equally instructive example of how not to write a libretto.

In view of what Boito later wrote, it should be explained that he was only twenty-six when he wrote Mefistofele and apparently the mature sense of discrimination which made his Otello so successful was not yet

fully developed. Mefistofele was written with great attention to the purely verbal texture but it contains too many characters and scenes that are completely superfluous to our understanding of the work and which would, therefore, have been better omitted. Boito expended so much time on these extraneous incidents, such as the passing of the Elector and his entourage across the stage in Act I and Mefistofele's flirtation with Marta in Act II, that he was obliged to force the entire Second Part of Goethe's poem into one short last act and epilogue. Boito began the libretto well with the "Prologue in Heaven" but in trying to include everything, he ended it not having done enough.

Although the number of major characters in a libretto should be small (but large enough to allow the composer to set each character to a different vocal range thereby giving the music variety of tone-colour), nevertheless, the cast of extras making up the chorus can be potentially very large indeed. An example of how both these conventions can be taken to an extreme and used for great dramatic impact is Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov (1870). Here, there is only one major character in the conventional sense of the term, the tsar Boris himself. But in counterpoint to him stands not one single figure, but all the people of Russia, a part played here by the opera chorus. So significant, in fact, is the role played by "the People" in Godunov that the chorus becomes a major dramatic character in its own right. Indeed, Mussorgsky's elevation of the chorus from a mere commentator on the action to an actual participant in it was one of his most revolutionary innovations.

The existence of a chorus in opera is, actually, one of the libretto's outstanding advantages over ordinary spoken drama. Perhaps because of the Greek-inspired ideals out of which opera and the libretto were born,

the libretto is the one literary form which has retained, right up until the present day, the ancient Greek convention of the chorus. This places at the librettist's disposal one additional character, a "collective" role wherein many performers can, by playing and singing as a unit, be used to personify one larger, "collective" body. Before Mussorgsky, the chorus was usually used as a part of the over-all spectacle, adding little more than local colour to the plot; after Mussorgsky, its presence was recognized as that which made the libretto, of all literary forms, the one best suited to portray the most graphically and the most succinctly the confrontation between an individual and any of the collective forces of society as a whole. It was Mussorgsky's harnessing of the libretto's unique ability to portray, as in Godunov, the People or even the spirit of an entire nation as an actual character on stage that lent Boris Godunov so much of its dramatic power. In other words, it was his use of the chorus as a dramatic character that allowed him, as a librettist, to explore such issues as kingship and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in such a remarkably concise yet penetrating way. It is no wonder, then, that literary historian D.S. Mirsky, on the basis of this libretto, has called Mussorgsky "the greatest Russian tragic poet of the period."<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps it is the libretto's capacity to portray "the People" and other "collective" forces that accounts, at least in part, for why, in recent times, opera has become such an important art-form in such countries as the Soviet Union and China where, unlike in the West, the opera-text is esteemed as a legitimate subject for serious critical discussion and study. Political considerations do, it is true, play a large role here but, as has already been noted elsewhere, the libretto has had a long

history of involvement in political affairs; the livret à thèse tradition is, after all, a very long one. In addition to the examples of this in Western literature given above, others of interest can be briefly mentioned here. John Gay's The Beggar's Opera (1728), which later served as the source of inspiration of Brecht's Threepenny Opera, satirized both the politicians of the day (the Prime Minister Walpole is satirized in the figures of both Peachum and Macheath) and famous opera singers. Verdi, of course, was for a long time associated with the Risorgimento (his very name became a slogan: "Viva Verdi" meant "Viva Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia"), and his libretti read as political gestures demanding liberty. The performance of Scribe's and Auber's La Muette de Portici (1828), the story of the revolt of the people of Naples against the Spanish, was in 1830 the event that sparked the Belgian revolution against the Dutch. George Bernard Shaw's The Perfect Wagnerite (1899) is a socialist interpretation of Wagner's Ring cycle and in our century, the libretti of Bertolt Brecht are searing indictments of capitalism written from the Marxist point-of-view. Opera is one of the most "social"-- Soviet composer Yuri Shaporin has called it the most democratic--<sup>57</sup> of art-forms; the study of its libretto as what Kurt Honolka has termed "ein Politikum,"<sup>58</sup> particularly in our century, would be a fascinating study in its own right.

The principle of simultaneity noted above in relation both to the visual element in libretto-writing and to the chorus operates to the libretto's advantage on yet another level. I refer here to the possibilities for dramatic and verbal irony made available by the librettistic convention of ensemble-writing, a form of literary counterpoint which allows several characters to speak at once and all be understood.



Although there have been several attempts to apply the musical technique of counterpoint to literature, Aldous Huxley's novel Point Counter Point (1928) being the most conspicuous example here, all of these experiments have been, to a greater or a lesser degree, unsuccessful. This is inevitable since counterpoint, being basically an aural (or, in some cases, a visual) technique, is incompatible with the silent and solitary process of reading. Counterpoint can be defined as the simultaneous presentation of two or more individualized but related melodic lines and hence, the verbal equivalent of hearing two or more musical themes would be, strictly speaking, reading two or more passages at once. But, clearly, this is a physical impossibility. (For an example of a contrapuntal experiment which asks its readers to do precisely this, see Sacheverell Sitwell's poem "On Hearing Four Bands Play at Once in a Public Square.")<sup>59</sup>

By definition, then, literary counterpoint can be possible in only those verbal texts written to be read aloud. To carry the musical analogy through completely, a further stipulation would have to be that several people speak at once and that each of their passages be different, though related to each other in some way. The only literary text which fulfils each of these three requirements is the libretto.

Since the late eighteenth century, it has been a standard librettistic convention to write dramatic ensembles, sustained passages in which several characters sing different words simultaneously. Whereas it is impossible to read several lines at once, it is possible to understand them when sung and it is for this reason that the libretto, unlike any other literary genre, is capable of true verbal counterpoint. In this instance, music, which has, in other respects, imposed certain limitations on the libretto, here lends it some of its

strengths. Although the arrangement of an ensemble text on the printed page of a libretto is still rather awkward-- usually involving the use of a bracket in the margin--, in performance, however, with musical accompaniment, several texts can be understood as one, in rather the same way as several subjects are understood in a fugue. Here, then, in a sense, is Walter Pater's ideal attained; by virtue of its alliance with a single, unifying melodic line, the libretto, a verbal structure, achieves the condition of music.<sup>60</sup>

It can be argued that when such an ensemble is sung, the likelihood of every word's being clearly heard is rather remote. This, it cannot be denied, is true but the accomplished librettist will arrange his text in such a way that the audience will know what is being said without actually having to hear each word. There are basically two ways of accomplishing this. The careful librettist will reserve ensemble scenes for periods of reflection, wherein the various characters can pause and express sentiments which the audience is already familiar with or prepared to expect. Thus, the texts that make up an ensemble should be primarily emotional, never informational, in content and should consist preferably of passages which the audience has already heard each character sing individually. In this way, what comes to the fore is the dramatic irony and tension that result from the simultaneous expression of several contrasting, often conflicting, emotions.

One of the most famous examples of this uniquely librettistic technique is the renowned quartet in Piave's and Verdi's Rigoletto (1851), after Victor Hugo's Le Roi s'amuse (1832). However, the recognition scene, which forms the tragic climax of so many Greek-inspired librettistic plots, furnishes the strongest opportunity for this sort of

dramatic irony. Here, a good example is the Fourth Movement of the Auden-Kallman libretto The Bassarids where Agave and Autonoe, upon recovering from their Bacchanalian frenzy, discover to their horror that they are guilty of the murder of Pentheus, their king and kin:

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cadmus    | Night and again the night.<br>The great House has fallen,<br>Never to be rebuilt.<br>I who raised these walls<br>Am brought down to the dust. . . .                               |
| Beroe     | Night and again the night.<br>Unaya! . . .<br>The master I loved is fallen,<br>The child of my breast is dead.<br>Night and again the night. . . .                                |
| Autonoe   | I didn't want to do it.<br>Agave made me do it.<br>She always was the stronger.<br>I didn't want to do it.<br>Agave made me do it<br>And now we both must suffer. . . .           |
| Tiresias  | I grieve for this young man:<br>But Fate, though cruel, is just.<br>He who was deaf to my warning<br>Can now hear nothing at all. . . .<br>But Fate, though cruel, is just. . . . |
| Bassarids | We were far away on the lonely mountain<br>Dancing in innocent joy<br>To the pure sound of the flute,<br>Singing of Dionysus,<br>Twice-born God of the vine. . . .61              |

When making a literary analysis of a librettistic passage such as this, the literary critic must remember that all these lines were written to be sung simultaneously and remember also to take this fact into account when making his evaluation of it, both as a selection in itself and in its relation to the drama as a whole.

One of the most problematic issues in any discussion of the libretto and its convention is that of librettistic stylistics. Although "the single most notable criterion for judging librettos has always been

the quality of the verse,"<sup>62</sup> there are still many who maintain, in effect, that a good libretto should, in fact, be bad poetry. Modern drama critic Eric Bentley, for instance, would have us believe that:

. . . great poetry set to music is not an ideal recipe for opera, in fact that there is no great dramatic poetry yet written that operatic music would not ruin.<sup>63</sup>

While the first view, outlined above by P.J. Smith, does have its limitations-- primarily in that the just evaluation of a librettos's merit must include a consideration of more factors than merely its style-- , the second view is completely untenable for, if the libretti of Beaumarchais, Boito or Brecht, among others, are any indication, it is a position simply refuted by the facts. No opera ever written has been enhanced by having doggerel as its verse and music does not "ruin" great poetry; Schubert's Lieder, as, for instance, his setting of Goethe's "Erlkönig," are proof enough of this. When speculating about the possibilities of a union between literature and music, conclusions must be drawn on the basis of the best, and not the worst, that has been done. And judging by the best in librettistic literature, the alliance with music is not excuse for second-rate writing.

This is not to say, however, that the libretto does not demand a style of writing peculiar to itself; the fact that this is indeed the case becomes abundantly clear from even the most cursory comparison of an ordinary spoken work and its subsequent librettistic adaption. Because words when sung and accompanied by music are harder than spoken words for an audience to understand and because the libretto is their only source of information about the drama, it is necessary to an understanding of the plot that the text of a libretto be projected with the maximum of clarity. It is for these reasons that the poetics of the



libretto demands what can be broadly termed a plain style. "The Librettist," Hoffmann tells us, "ought to strive for the utmost simplicity of language" and must seek to express his meaning with as much force and precision as possible.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, we can say that the right choice of words is equally important to the librettist as it is to the ordinary dramatist. Not only must the librettist be careful to select those words which are capable of being both comfortably sung and powerfully projected (how a librettist solves these problems will depend upon the acoustical qualities of the language in which he writes), but he must be doubly sure that his precise meaning is clear, so that even should the music submerge some of the diction, not all will be lost. Because of all these considerations, the most important informational passages of a libretto, as opposed to the more lyrical arias, are best expressed in the most dynamic parts of speech, in the "action" words, verbs and nouns. Adjectives and adverbs, being essentially passive, should be used with discrimination and only for the most expressive of effects; as in spoken play, long descriptive passages tend to be dramatically static and, hence, are best left to the novel. Similarly, figures of speech (individual conceits such as similes and metaphors) should not be unduly long or baroque in their implications; these, too, must be concise and clear. This is not to dismiss, however, the large-scale literary techniques such as allegory (The Ring cycle) or symbolism (Pelléas) which are eminently well-suited to the libretto-form and can be very elaborate indeed.

Perhaps few twentieth-century librettists combined all of these stylistic demands with greater skill and to greater advantage than Bertolt Brecht, whose libretti are characterized by a powerful and expressive economy of diction. The following stanza from the famous song "Pirate

Jenny" from The Threepenny Opera forcefully illustrates the dramatic and evocative possibilities of the plain style powerfully used:

Gentlemen, today you see me washing up the glasses  
 And making up the beds and cleaning.  
 When you give me p'raps a penny, I will curtsey rather well.  
 When you see my tatty clothing and this tatty old hotel  
 P'raps you little guess with whom you're dealing.  
 One fine afternoon there will be shouting from the harbor.  
 Folk will ask: what's the reason for that shout?  
 They will see me smiling while I rinse the glasses  
 And will say: what has she to smile about?  
     And a ship with eight sails and  
     With fifty great cannon  
     Sails in to the quay.<sup>65</sup>

Here, Brecht's use of the refrain draws our attention to one other major consideration in the writing of a libretto. When the plot calls for a moment of reflection (the aria), the librettist must be prepared to write a text that will bear repetition should the music demand it. This is yet another reason for careful craftsmanship for if lines sound awkward the first time they are sung, then this fault will only become all the more glaring upon repetition.<sup>66</sup>

It should not be supposed that this virtue of being what Hassall has called "at once direct and concise without flatness"<sup>67</sup> is a quality easily achieved. It would be well to remember that Strauss called the libretto one of the more demanding of literary forms and to remember, in addition, that while a clear and simple style is easy to read, it is deceptively difficult to attain. The writing of an accomplished libretto is perhaps one of the best lessons in literary discipline and skill and it will come hard, especially to those who tend towards verbosity.

"Ultimately," wrote Canadian librettist and playwright Eugene Benson (Heloise and Abelard, 1973), "the best libretto, like the purest style, is distinguished by its discretion."<sup>68</sup> And, certainly, discretion, and its corollary, the power of evoking far more than is actually stated,

is a quality of poetry at its best.

Before leaving a discussion of the librettistic convention necessitated by the alliance with music, on other musical factor must be considered. In a letter to Hofmannsthal, Strauss pointed out that the fundamental difference "between recited drama and poetry written for music" is that "apart from the person about to compose it, no one can possibly judge a serious, poetically valuable operatic text until he has heard it with the music."<sup>69</sup> Although the extent to which one examines a text in relation to its music will depend to a considerable degree on the circumstances of the collaboration (and the relationship between Strauss and Hofmannsthal was, in many ways, exceptional), such an examination does figure in our judgment of the finished product, of the opera as Gesamtkunstwerk. As Strauss implied, a composer, before he sits down to write his music, will usually interpret the text for himself and since the musical commentary can, in performance, often strongly influence our feelings about what is happening on stage, it is essential for us to understand what the music has to say. In other words, because of its union with music, opera consists simultaneously of both a text and of an interpretation of it and it is the duty of our hybrid critic to understand them both.

The musician has many ways of conveying his ideas about a text. Questions which we, as interpreters of an interpretation, can ask here include: on whom does the composer lavish his most poignant melodies? what special musical effects call our attention to what particular events or utterances? in his setting of the text, what words does the composer emphasize? A fine illustration of music's ability to interpret a line is to be found in Act II of Gluck's Iphigénie en Tauride where Oreste's

aria "Le calme rentre dans mon coeur" is accompanied by, surprisingly enough, a very agitated figure in the violins:

Mme. de Staël relates in her book De l'Allemagne how this passage was questioned by the violinists of the Opera, since the accompaniment seems to contradict the nature of the text; Gluck explained that although Oreste says he is becoming calm, his mother's murder still weighs on him, and his internal agitation is expressed by the accompaniment.<sup>70</sup>

But this passage can also be used to illustrate an important stipulation that must be borne in mind when studying the music of an opera. Although the music here appears to be adding something which is not in these particular words themselves, it must be remembered that the music cannot tell us anything which is not consistent with the text as a whole. A musician can illuminate a text, he can enrich a text, but he can contradict it only for the purpose of dramatic irony and even this must first of all be textually justified. Gluck cannot tell us musically that Oreste is haunted by guilt unless we can deduce this from either Oreste's words or his actions on stage. If we cannot do so, then we are in no way justified in assuming or accepting that the agitated accompaniment specifically signifies "his internal agitation." Unlike language, music, it must be remembered, deals with emotions only and not with facts. To quote W.H. Auden, "music can, I believe, express the equivalent of 'I love' but it is incapable of saying who or what I love-- you, God or the decimal system."<sup>71</sup> Therefore, if it were not for Gluck's comment, the likes of which composers only rarely provide, we would be equally justified in interpreting this passage of Gluck's music as a foreshadowing of Oreste's tragic fate or, perhaps, as an ironic commentary on what the composer thought Oreste should be feeling at this time but is not. Because music cannot communicate on specific terms, musical criticism



about what a composer is trying to tell us is highly subjective and it is for this reason that interpretations about musical messages must always be substantiated by information either implicit or explicit within the text itself.

In addition, while it is within the musician's power to enrich a text as Gluck has done, it must be kept in mind that a librettist has no means of guaranteeing a sensitive musical treatment of his words. Because of this, the librettist must never use music as an excuse for laxity; a libretto must always be, as far as possible, a dramatically complete and convincing work in its own right. As Hofmannsthal said, a librettist must write, first of all, not for the composer, but for himself.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, it is most often the case that a librettist will write with a specific composer in mind and if this is so and if they are working in close collaboration and have confidence in one another, then the librettist will often leave certain things in his text unstated in order that his musician might do so instead. Speaking of his opera White Wings, Douglas Moore mentions the discovery he and his librettist Philip Barry made when adapting the play into the libretto:

One thing that Barry and I discovered to our surprise was that so much dialogue could be omitted without harm to the play. Music, although slowing up the pace, can provide many short cuts in characterization and description.<sup>73</sup>

It is the job of the critic to determine what and where these omissions are and if they are justified in the terms of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Often the operatic result will be dramatically whole where neither words nor music alone were.

All the same, the libretto, as a verbal structure, lends itself to

the same literary analyses as any other literary work, such as an explication de texte type study, an examination of the libretto in relation to the author's non-operatic works, and an examination of the libretto both in relation to the over-all literary movements of the time and in relation to the librettistic tradition itself. In addition to these conventional approaches, the libretto can often throw other literary phenomena into an interesting new light. When a libretto is an adaption, for instance, it is an excellent indication of the way a later age saw an earlier work; as P.J. Smith notes in relation to Shakespeare's Othello and Boito's Otello, an age will adapt a work as it sees it.<sup>74</sup> In this way, the libretto can be used as an invaluable source-book for literary historians; Barbier and Carré's Faust, for example, throws no new light on the Goethe but in that it places Marguerite in the great French tradition of tragic heroines (Phèdre, Manon Lescaut and, later, Madame Bovary), it is an eloquent testimonial to how Goethe's poem was received and understood in France.

But even though the libretto as an adaption can tell us much about literary trends in general and much about the unique requirements of the libretto-form, the literary study of the libretto must go beyond this purely derivative stage, to which it has for so long been limited, and must embark upon the analysis of the libretto as a literary work in its own right. Here, one must concur with Soviet composer Dimitri Shostakovich when he writes:

But how often, in practice, do we still . . . compare the resemblance of an operatic character with his literary prototype! Comparisons of this kind are not without value and are sometimes necessary, but they should not be the main criterion.<sup>75</sup>

The libretto merits being examined in relation to its own unique con-

ventions. The librettistic conventions outlined above in relation to subject matter, plot construction, characterization and style are those basic to the libretto-form, regardless of the vicissitudes of the day, and those to which all libretti conform, to one degree or another. However, it must be kept in mind that certain conventions have not remained constant throughout the ages but have undergone that same process of metamorphosis characteristic of all artistic conventions in general. The conventions governing Metastasio's opera seria, for instance, demanded three acts, six characters (no more than three of which were on stage at once), and, as in the French classical theatre of the time, forbade the representation of violence on stage. These librettistic conventions, which were obviously so closely related to the general dramatic and literary tendencies of the time, are operable today in only those works which strive to be deliberately anachronistic. Yet, Metastasio's libretti cannot be properly understood or even appreciated without our taking them into account. This same consideration of convention must now be accorded to all libretti and in all studies of the libretto as literature.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Igor Stravinsky, W.H. Auden and The Rake's Progress

Few librettists writing in this century have followed the dictates of librettistic convention as deliberately and as faithfully as W.H. Auden did in writing The Rake's Progress (1951). But even as a near prototype of most of the conventions of libretto-writing outlined above, The Rake is no mere exercise but is, on the contrary, one of the most beautifully written and technically accomplished libretti of our time. Indeed, as a virtuosic tour de force, both as a vehicle for music and as a major contribution to English dramatic poetry, The Rake's Progress has been acclaimed in musical and literary circles alike. Igor Stravinsky, who originally suggested the idea, called it "surely one of the most beautiful of libretti."<sup>1</sup>

He [Auden] was inspired, and he inspired me. In fact I wonder whether any poet since the Elizabethans has made a composer such a beautiful gift of words for music . . .<sup>2</sup>

Literary critic John G. Blair, in his study of Auden's poetry, concludes that "not only is The Rake's Progress a fine operatic poem; it can also be seen as an epitome of Auden's mature poetic mode."<sup>3</sup> And Joseph Kerman is understandably elated that the English language has at last, in his view, produced a libretto indisputably capable of holding its own among the acknowledged librettistic masterpieces in French, German and Italian. "The first stunning thing about the Rake," Kerman writes, is

. . . the extraordinary experience of hearing first-class English verse and fine music working together from the



stage. It is faintest praise to observe that no other opera has been written in English with anything like the same effect. . . . I cannot help wondering whether there ever has been an opera with so elegant-sounding a libretto.<sup>4</sup>

All this is high praise indeed. As the work of one of England's greatest poets since T.S. Eliot, The Rake's Progress serves well as an eloquent testimonial to the vitality and artistic potential of the libretto as a literary form, even at its most "conventional."

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the study of the libretto requires that musical considerations be taken into account. This is certainly true in the case of The Rake's Progress but not exactly in the manner that one would ordinarily expect. The Rake undoubtedly bears the stamp of the composer, Igor Stravinsky, for whom it was written, but here it was not Stravinsky the musician so much as Stravinsky the littérateur whose influence was decisive.

That this should be the case is an exception in the history of libretto-writing but then Stravinsky was, particularly in his relations with literature, an exceptional man. Although, as we have already noted, many composers throughout librettistic history, notably Gluck, Berlioz, Wagner, Debussy and R. Strauss, have had strong literary inclinations and sympathies, few have displayed Stravinsky's ambition to be recollected not only as a musician, but as a writer as well. Many studies of Stravinsky as a writer have appeared<sup>5</sup> and in several of them, the virtuosity with which he handled the English language has even been compared to that of his fellow Russian exile, Vladimir Nabokov:

What marks them [Stravinsky and Nabokov] out as special is that each has endeavoured to transcend the basic aim of communication, coming to look upon their adopted language much as a gymnast might look upon a new and challenging piece of apparatus. In Stravinsky's case, it is incredible that English seems to have been his fourth modern language.<sup>6</sup>

Laurence Davies, in his study of Stravinsky's prose, has singled out as distinctive qualities of Stravinsky's style "his disbelieving tone, the wicked power of depiction . . . , his willingness to be side-tracked by some quite bizarre piece of intelligence" and quotes the following sketch from Stravinsky's Conversations of the stage-designer Léon Bakst as a typical example of Stravinsky's "deadpan" manner:

No one could describe him as concisely as Cocteau has done in his caricature. We were friends from our first meeting in St Petersburg, in 1909, though our conversation was largely Bakst's accounts of his exploits in the conquest of women, and my incredulity: 'Now Lev . . . you couldn't have done all that.' Bakst wore elegant hats, canes, spats, etc., but I think these were meant to detract from his Venetian comedy-mask nose. Like other dandies, Bakst was sensitive - and privately mysterious. Roerich told me that 'Bakst' was a Jewish word meaning 'little umbrella'. Roerich said he discovered this one day in Minsk, when he was caught in a thunder-shower and heard people sending their children home for 'Baksts', which then turned out to be what he said they were.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to being an accomplished writer in his own right, Stravinsky was fired by a life-long enthusiasm for literary matters and literary illuminati. Davies relates how Stravinsky, having inherited his father's love for books, had read intensively in the classics of Russian, English and French literature while still in his 'teens and how, in later years, his bookshelves were devoted to the works of T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, André Gide, Paul Valéry, Jean Cocteau and Thomas Mann, all of whom were numbered, at one time or another, among Stravinsky's close personal friends.<sup>8</sup> Stravinsky's erudition in the fields of art, music, literature and philosophy and his anecdotes about his friendships with virtually every important thinker, writer and artist of this century make his books facinating reading, even aside from their stylistic merits.

But it is not Stravinsky as a writer per se that concerns us here but rather the fact that his own considerable literary talents made him

unusually responsive to the literary talents in others. In point of fact, with the sole exception of his first opera Le Rossignol (1914), which he adapted with Stefan Mitusov from, in keeping with his preference for libretti of high literary quality, a fairy-tale by Hans Christian Andersen, Stravinsky did not write the libretti to any of his operas. In spite of his literary ability, Stravinsky was nevertheless a classic case of the composer who, as Hoffmann wrote, had an imagination lively enough to give birth to good operatic plots but who lacked "the mechanical skill needed in every art and presupposing constant endeavor and continuous practice."<sup>9</sup> Realizing his limitations but recognizing the best when he saw it, Stravinsky was extremely particular about the literary quality of the texts he set and it was for these reasons that he was throughout his career assiduous in commissioning on his own behalf only the very best that the available literary talent could provide.

As a result, few twentieth-century composers, with the notable exceptions of Richard Strauss and Benjamin Britten, can boast a more illustrious roster of literary collaborators than Stravinsky. His librettists have included the French-Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz (1878-1947) who wrote libretti for Stravinsky's next two operas after Le Rossignol, Renard (1916) and L'Histoire du soldat (1918). Incidentally, the latter, which, as Ramuz said, was written because he wanted "to demonstrate that the theater can be conceived in much broader terms than is usually the case,"<sup>10</sup> was the first epic opera and was thus a forerunner of Bertolt Brecht's later work in this area.<sup>11</sup> Stravinsky's next opera, Mavra (1922), was, at his own suggestion, based on Pushkin's short story "The Little House at Kolomna" and adapted by a young Russian poet named Boris Kochno of whose literary talents Stravinsky later appreciatively

wrote.<sup>12</sup> Literary considerations undoubtedly were foremost in Stravinsky's mind when he asked Jean Cocteau to write the libretto for his next theatrical project, Oedipus Rex (1927):

I thought that I could not do better for my libretto than to appeal to my old friend, Jean Cocteau, . . . I had just seen his Antigone, and had been much struck by the manner in which he had handled the ancient myth and presented it in modern guise. Cocteau's stagecraft is excellent. He has a sense of values and an eye and feeling for detail which always become of primary importance with him. This applies alike to the movements of the actors, the setting, the costumes, and, indeed, all the accessories. In the preceding year, too, I had again had an opportunity of appreciating these qualities of Cocteau in La Machine Infernale, . . .<sup>13</sup>

Stravinsky's sixth opera before The Rake was Perséphone (1934), set to an early play by André Gide at Gide's own request. Stravinsky later expressed dissatisfaction with Gide's text and recommended that before the opera be performed again, Auden, whom Stravinsky admired the most of all his librettists, should rewrite the words. That Stravinsky had very definite ideas about literary matters can be seen from the following passage:

My first recommendation for a Perséphone revival would be to commission Auden to fit the music with new words, as Werfel did La forza del destino. The rhymes are leaden-eared:

Perséphone confuse  
se refuse

. . . And the text borders, at times, on unconscious comedy: "ivre de nuit . . . encore mal reveillée," for example, sounds like the description of a hang-over.<sup>14</sup>

Following The Rake, arrangements were made to write music to a libretto by Dylan Thomas. Unfortunately, however, this work, which was to be on the subject of the rebirth of the world after a nuclear or cosmic holocaust, was forestalled by the poet's untimely death in 1953. Similarly, an operatic collaboration between Stravinsky and his close friend T.S. Eliot never progressed beyond the planning stage.



Throughout his career, then, Stravinsky sought and received the work of some of the most celebrated names in modern letters. By doing so, Stravinsky ultimately did the libretto an invaluable service, for as one of the prime movers in the creation of the twentieth-century trend towards the literarization of the libretto, he was undoubtedly one of this century's major forces in encouraging first-rate writers to regard the libretto as a serious art-form once more.

There can be no doubt that this was precisely the effect Stravinsky had on W.H. Auden, for it was only at Stravinsky's instigation that Auden, discouraged after the failure of his first libretto, Paul Bunyan (1941), a work which we will discuss in greater detail later, returned with The Rake to the libretto-form. In the light of the success of The Rake and of Auden's subsequent libretti, which were themselves the result of his renewed confidence both in himself as a librettist and in the libretto as a form, one cannot help but think that Stravinsky's decision to approach Auden with that particular project at that particular time ranks as one of his greatest services to the librettistic cause.

Thus, in keeping with Stravinsky's general tendency to ask someone else to give literary form to his own ideas, The Rake was initially the result of Stravinsky's own imagination. Although, in the end, The Rake was, as with all the major libretti which Stravinsky commissioned, ultimately the product of Auden's, of the librettist's, own distinctive genius, nevertheless, The Rake does bear some traces of the ideas and theories which Stravinsky held at the time of its conception. Before discussing Auden's contribution, then, it is first necessary to consider Stravinsky's, for his intentions were, in fact, the foundation upon which Auden's Rake was eventually built.<sup>15</sup>

The Rake's Progress was the work which culminated Stravinsky's neoclassical period (other works here include Pulcinella (1919), based on themes by Pergolesi; Le Baiser de la fée (1928), based on another fairy-tale by Hans Christian Andersen and musically a tribute to Stravinsky's beloved Glinka and Tchaikovsky; and the two operas on classical subjects, Oedipus Rex and Perséphone), and as such, reflects to a considerable extent his own preoccupation with the questions of tradition and convention. The operas which Stravinsky had composed prior to The Rake had actually been what we can call "mixed media" pieces, works which combined elements not only from opera, but from ballet, oratorio and the spoken theatre as well. It was now Stravinsky's idea to write a full-fledged opera in the most conventional sense of the term by which he intended to prove the continuing validity of the classical tradition to modern music.

For Stravinsky, a sense of tradition was the single most important factor in assuring "the continuity of creation"<sup>16</sup> and in this respect, he has much in common with the theories of T.S. Eliot. So reminiscent, in fact, are many of Stravinsky's pronouncements on this subject that he can very well be called Eliot's musical counterpart. In the following passage from the Poetics of Music, delivered at Harvard University in 1939 as a series of lectures when he occupied the Charles Eliot Norton chair of poetics, Stravinsky clearly echoes Eliot's famous statement in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920) that "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence":<sup>17</sup>

The artist imposes a culture upon himself and ends by imposing it upon others. That is how tradition becomes established. . . . A real tradition is not the relic of a past that is irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present. . . . Far from implying the repetition of what has been, tradition presupposes the reality of what endures. It appears as

an heirloom, a heritage that one receives on condition of making it bear fruit before passing it on to one's descendants.<sup>18</sup>

Accompanying his belief in Eliot's "historical sense," went Stravinsky's belief in the artistic "necessity for order and discipline"<sup>19</sup> and hence in the necessity of conventions as well. Believing that ". . . only very bad art is not artificial,"<sup>20</sup> Stravinsky wrote:

The need for restriction, for deliberately submitting to a style, has its source in the very depths of our nature, and is found not only in matters of art, but in every conscious manifestation of human activity. It is the need for order without which nothing can be achieved, and upon the disappearance of which everything disintegrates. Now all order demands restraint. But one would be wrong to regard that as any impediment to liberty. On the contrary, the style, the restraint, contribute to its development, and only prevent liberty from degenerating into license. At the same time, in borrowing a form already established and consecrated, the creative artist is not in the least restricting the manifestation of his personality. On the contrary, it is more detached, and stands out better when it moves within the definite limits of a convention.<sup>21</sup>

It can be mentioned here that Stravinsky's belief in the necessity of tradition and convention accounts for his life-long opposition to the Wagnerian music drama. "I believe 'music drama' and 'opera' to be two very, very different things," wrote Stravinsky on the subject of The Rake. "My life work is a devotion to the latter."<sup>22</sup> It is one of the striking paradoxes of Stravinsky's career that despite his own literary acumen, his constant concern for literary values and interest in the theatre, that he was nonetheless an exponent of pure music and believed that Wagner, by turning music "into an object of philosophical speculation," had caused music to betray her artistic self-sufficiency.<sup>23</sup> Yet this was not Stravinsky's major objection. Ironical as it again may seem, especially considering how Stravinsky himself began his career as one of the most innovative and iconoclastic members of the musical avant-garde, Stravinsky

objected to Wagner primarily because he had broken with the classical tradition. He had been, in Stravinsky's view, "the typical revolutionary"<sup>24</sup> who, in rejecting the conventional arias and recitatives of the classical Nummernoper for the improvisation and endless melody of the durchkomponierte, had brought chaos to art and had violated the artistic necessity for order and discipline.

The projected work, then, would definitely be an opera. Stravinsky's problem now was to find a subject that would lend itself to his avowed neoclassical programme. In addition, ever since moving to the United States, Stravinsky had the idea of composing an opera to an English libretto but had hitherto lacked the congenial subject for this project as well. In 1947, however, he unexpectedly found the subject that fulfilled all his expectations. Seeing English artist William Hogarth's series of prints "A Rake's Progress" immediately suggested to him "a series of operatic scenes"<sup>25</sup> and he realized that here at last was the English subject for which he had been searching. The spirit of these eighteenth-century engravings, which had been created at roughly the same time as Mozart had lived, would be perfectly suited to a classical opera of "modest Mozartian proportions."<sup>26</sup> It was precisely with the idea of a conventional opera based on "A Rake's Progress" that Stravinsky, largely at the recommendation of his friend and neighbour Aldous Huxley, approached W.H. Auden.<sup>27</sup>

Before moving on to a consideration of Auden and The Rake, it would be well to point out that The Rake was not the first libretto to be inspired by a work from the visual arts. Considering how great is the importance of the visual in opera, this phenomenon is not at all surprising. By far the most famous libretto in this regard is Berlioz's Benvenuto



Cellini (1838) which was based on Cellini's Autobiography and which depicts in one scene the casting of Cellini's famous statue of Perseus. Other major libretti based on works of art include Joseph Gregor's Friedenstag (1938) for Richard Strauss and based on Velasquez's painting and Calderón's drama La Rendición de Breda; Mathis der Maler (1938) by Hindemith after the life of German painter Matthias Grünewald (1500-1530) and his altar-piece at Colmar; and Gian Carlo Menotti's Amahl and the Night Visitors (1951) after the painting "The Adoration of the Magi" by Hieronymus Bosch. Goyescas (1916) by the composer Granados belongs here, too, and is a curious work in librettistic history for another reason as well, being one of those rare cases where the libretto, here the work of Fernando Periquet, was written after the music had already been composed.

Although Stravinsky later told Auden that it was the figure of a blind beggar playing a one-stringed fiddle which originally gave him the idea of the opera<sup>28</sup> (there is actually no such figure in the completed libretto), one can easily see why Hogarth's "A Rake's Progress" appealed so strongly to the imagination of both Stravinsky and Auden. As a warning of the dangers and ultimate consequences of the licentious life, "A Rake's Progress" was a didactic and moral work and was thus reminiscent of the moral tone of Stravinsky's Renard and Histoire du soldat and, to an even greater extent, of the satiric tone of Auden's Paul Bunyan. But more significantly, "A Rake's Progress" consisted of eight engravings chronicling the journey of a young profligate from indulgence in vice to eventual madness in Bedlam and was therefore a narrative in pictures. Indeed, the fact that Stravinsky saw them as "a series of operatic scenes" is yet a further indication of his keen artistic sensibility in fields other

than music for it was precisely as a series of theatrical scenes that Hogarth had intended his pictorial cycles ("A Rake's Progress" and "A Harlot's Progress") to be judged:

A most significant aspect of the composition of Hogarth's early cycles is their relationship with the stage. It is typical of his mentality and procedure that, in their general arrangement and in the movements of his figures, he learned more from the stage than from the ever-recurrent motives of Dutch genre paintings. He appreciated every kind of stage effect - the tableaux-vivants of the pantomimes as well as the ordinary drama, its characters and techniques. . . . He expressly compared the scenes of his cycles with dumb shows: 'My picture is my stage, and men and women my players, who by means of certain actions and gestures are to exhibit a dumb show.' On the other hand, so great was the success of his series that they in turn gave suggestions to the theatre.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Brothel and the Bedlam scenes were the only ones from the Hogarth to find their way into the completed libretto, there can be little doubt that of all the suggestions "A Rake's Progress" has given to the theatre, the Auden-Stravinsky version has been by far the most outstanding. This is not without its irony, however, for in the original "A Rake's Progress," opera, too, was the butt of Hogarth's satire.<sup>30</sup>

The borrowing of themes and motifs from the visual arts for the purpose of adapting them to music and literature raises the deeper philosophical questions of not only the inter-relationships between the arts but also of the tendency, prevalent in aesthetics since the notorious "ut pictura poesis" of Horace, to describe one art in the terms of another. Although this is an issue far too complex to be more than just touched upon here, it must at least be mentioned for it has already made two unacknowledged appearances in these pages.

In Gluck's plea for a consideration of literary values in opera, he likened the relationship between literature and music in opera to the relationship between colour and line in a painting, an analogy, it will

be remembered, with which Berlioz later took exception. Gluck's famous observation, written in 1767, participated in the prevailing neoclassical tendency towards equating poetry with painting, a tendency which had been the commonly held belief ever since Horace.

But it is interesting to note that in 1766, but one year earlier, Lessing's Laokoön had appeared, the book which, more than any other, pointed out the fallacies in the "ut pictura poesis" way of thinking. Following Laokoön, the trend gradually began turning towards likening literature to music and it is in this stream of thought that Walter Pater's "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music"<sup>31</sup> and also Paul Verlaine's "de la musique avant toute chose"<sup>32</sup> belong. Pronouncements such as these contributed significantly to the climate that produced the great twentieth-century experiments in "the musicalization of fiction," to borrow Huxley's phrase,<sup>33</sup> by such eminent authors as Romain Rolland (Jean-Christophe, 1904-1912), Marcel Proust (A la Recherche du temps perdu, 1913-1928), Aldous Huxley (Point Counter Point, 1928), T.S. Eliot (The Four Quartets, 1943), and Thomas Mann (Doktor Faustus, 1947). This trend towards the "musicalization" of fiction and the trend towards the "literarization" of the libretto are opposite sides of the same coin; to think of literature in relation to music is one of the most distinguishing features of modernism in twentieth-century letters.<sup>34</sup>

To return to W.H. Auden, we have seen how Stravinsky influenced Auden and his libretto in basically three ways. It was, first of all, Stravinsky's commission that was largely responsible for Auden's return, after a six-year absence, to the librettistic fold. It was also Stravinsky who provided not only the subject-matter for Auden's new librettistic endeavor, but, more importantly, also the approach to be taken in the

writing of it, a circumstance which was to have far-reaching effects on Auden's librettistic work beyond The Rake as well.

Auden was very receptive to all of Stravinsky's operatic ideas and intentions. Although in his later libretti, Delia, or a Masque of Night (1953), Elegy for Young Lovers (1960), The Bassarids (1966) and the Moralities (1967), he would act more on his own initiative, Auden at the time of The Rake assumed a Da Ponte-like attitude towards his relationship with his composer. Writing in his first letter to Stravinsky, Auden called the chance to work with him "the greatest honour of my life" and said he believed it to be "the librettist's job to satisfy the composer, not the other way round."<sup>35</sup> In fact, it was to this end that the initial plot outline of The Rake was drawn up by both Stravinsky and Auden in consultation.<sup>36</sup>

It must be pointed out, however, that despite Auden's humble attitude, he did make many suggestions even at this preliminary stage; the ideas for Mother Goose and the Ugly Duchess, for instance, were his own and were in accordance with those aspects of his librettistic theory which he had developed even before his meeting with Stravinsky. And, not surprisingly, Auden also showed a much greater awareness than Stravinsky of the problems involved in trying to adapt the central character of a pictorial cycle to the central character in a musico-literary work. Auden's comments on these difficulties are worth quoting here for the additional light they shed not only on the necessity of a literary mind in the writing of a libretto but also on the above-mentioned issue of the inter-relationships between the arts:

In his engraving, Hogarth is not interested in the Rake as a person; his main concern is to make a series of pictures satirizing various aspects of life in eighteenth-century London. The only function of the Rake is to give



the series a certain unity by appearing in them all . . . . . Further, the nature of the visual arts is such that they cannot portray inner conflict. Hogarth's Rake is a purely passive figure whose role is to succumb to whatever temptation, lust, boredom, money, etc., he is led into next. This filled us with dismay for, as I have said, passive characters cannot sing. So far as a story was concerned, all we had to start with was the basic premise of a young man who inherits a fortune, is corrupted by it and ends in penury and madness, . . . .37

Auden had some reservations about the subject-matter but as to writing his libretto in the most conventional "classical" manner, Auden submitted to this idea humbly, saying that is suited him very well "since for a beginner, it is technically easier to write a libretto for such conventions than a music drama of Wagnerian type."<sup>38</sup> For an explanation of why Auden was so willing to subordinate himself to Stravinsky in this matter and of why he called himself "a beginner" when "a beginner" he certainly was not, we must turn to Auden's first libretto, Paul Bunyan.

Auden wrote Paul Bunyan in 1941 for a young English composer named Benjamin Britten. Even before Paul Bunyan, Auden had considerable experience as a writer of texts for music; he and Britten had collaborated on various musico-literary projects since 1936 and in the course of their partnership had produced such works as the "Symphonic Cycle for Soprano and Orchestra," The Hunting Fathers (1936) and the Hymn to St. Cecilia (1942). But Paul Bunyan was both Auden's and Britten's first foray into the operatic field and although both, later in their respective careers, went on to create librettistic and operatic works of outstanding merit, their Paul Bunyan was on both sides an unmitigated failure. So disappointed were they by this that after Bunyan's initial one-week run at Columbia University, Auden and Britten withdrew both libretto and score and gave them to the University's library with instructions that they never be published or performed or allowed to circulate.<sup>39</sup>

Auden critic John G. Blair has said that the failure of Paul Bunyan "throws little light on Auden's more mature work in opera."<sup>40</sup> He is, however, greatly mistaken in this for an examination of Auden's operatic debut reveals a great deal about Auden's librettistic theories, or, rather, his lack of them, prior to The Rake and thereby goes a long way towards explaining the impact of Auden's later and very decisive partnership with Stravinsky.

Foreshadowing Auden's later conviction that the best subjects for a libretto are those that deal with "the secondary worlds" of legend and myth,<sup>41</sup> Auden's first libretto was an attempt to dramatize the American legend of the mythical giant, Paul Bunyan. According to Auden, his libretto was intended to present "in a compressed fairy-story form the development of the continent from a virgin forest before the birth of Paul Bunyan to settlement and cultivation when Paul Bunyan says goodbye because he is no longer needed."<sup>42</sup> As far as Auden's decision to use this particular legend was concerned, the fault lay not with Auden's intention, which, as we can recognize, was already consistent with librettistic convention, but with his failure, when making his choice, to take theatrical and musical considerations into account. Auden found he had considerable difficulty in putting this particular legend on stage. Bunyan's "size and general mythical characteristics prevent his physical appearance on the stage," Auden wrote, and so he was forced to represent him by only an off-stage speaking voice. Similarly, Bunyan's famous giant blue ox, Babe, could hardly appear on stage either. Other problems which presented themselves were the impossibility of depicting Bunyan's heroic exploits directly and the necessity of inventing female characters in a legend in which there originally were none in order to

secure variety of musical tone-colour.<sup>43</sup>

Auden evidently never forgot this lesson about the necessity of considering the eventual musical setting before planning and writing the text. This, for instance, had been the way in which Stravinsky had insisted they plan their initial plot-line together.<sup>44</sup> Auden's failure to do so when planning Paul Bunyan probably contributed significantly to Auden's taking an extremely exaggerated view of this matter in later years. His statement that "the verses which the librettist writes are not addressed to the public but are really a private letter to the composer"<sup>45</sup> constitutes one of the most over-stated versions of the "romantic" belief in the supremacy of the musical side of an operatic partnership. Even Stravinsky later complained about Auden's often exaggerated zeal in subordinating himself to the music. Speaking of their collaboration on the Elegy for J.F.K. (1964), Stravinsky wrote:

I provided him [Auden] with a few hazy hints, nothing important but perhaps something to help him start. I told him that I was thinking of a choral rather than a solo piece, to confine him to the simplest language. But Auden is almost too skillful. He not only anticipates the uses of music but is so ready to subordinate himself to it that he has to be circumvented to be kept far enough upstage.<sup>46</sup>

Here again, then, is the ironic situation of the composer exhibiting a greater concern for the text than his often too-timid librettist.

But aside from the troubles with the subject-matter, Paul Bunyan's major failing seems to have been an inconsistency of approach. According to Daniel G. Hoffmann, who actually saw several performances of the opera, Auden

. . . seems never to have decided, . . . exactly what sort of a play he had set out to write. It is by turns an epic, a romance, and a satire; consequently, the total effect is confusing.<sup>47</sup>

Not only did Auden try to portray the story of Paul Bunyan, but he tried to

combine this with a satire on the evils and hypocrisy of contemporary American society. The song "The Glamour Boys and Girls Have Grievances Too," a satire on America's idolization of Hollywood movie stars, is typical of this Brechtian vein:

You've no idea how dull it is  
Just being perfect nullities  
The idols of a democratic nation,  
The heroes of the multitude  
Their dreams of female pulchritude;  
We're very, very tired of admiration.<sup>48</sup>

But this satire is misplaced and serves only to contradict the epic elements of the story. Bunyan is a Promethean figure who is banished from the civilization he himself created; yet "in Auden's play, that life is compounded of such hypocrisy, tinsel, and shallowness that Paul Bunyan's exile to a fresher wilderness is only to be envied."<sup>49</sup>

All told, Hoffman notes no less than six different and often contradictory styles in Paul Bunyan. The final "litany" which concludes the drama is symptomatic of this over-all lack of dramatic direction:

The litany shows that his intentions were perhaps not sufficiently clear to himself, since the tone of this short excerpt changes almost line by line. Like the rest of the script, it is serious, satirical, and poignant by turns. In a work of only forty typewritten pages the effect is so self-contradictory that no consistent direction gives the libretto dramatic force.<sup>50</sup>

Robert A. Simon, who reviewed performances of Paul Bunyan for The New Yorker, concurs with Hoffman's conclusions and says Auden compounded these already fatal errors by using "such unconventional theatrical devices as wild geese, a Western Union messenger on a bicycle, a moon that turned blue, and a duet on the relative merits of soup and beans." All this contributed to the fact that "in the theater . . . Paul Bunyan didn't jell."<sup>51</sup>

Looking at Paul Bunyan in retrospect, it appears that although Auden



by 1941 had already developed certain ideas about libretto-writing which were to remain constant throughout his career as a librettist, nevertheless, in Paul Bunyan his librettistic technique was deficient in precisely those very areas to which Stravinsky would later unwittingly provide the solutions, that is, in the areas of choice of subject-matter and form.

Prior to Bunyan, Auden had already written several successful plays-- The Dance of Death (1933), The Dog Beneath the Skin (1935) and The Ascent of F-6 (1936), the latter two with Christopher Isherwood--, but clearly this experience did not help him here. In writing Paul Bunyan, Auden clearly had no idea of what it was to write a libretto and so had endeavored to concoct one out of a miscellaneous conglomeration of incompatible dramatic techniques and unconventional theatrical devices. In fact, Auden later admitted as much to critic Monroe K. Spears, saying that at the time of Paul Bunyan, he "knew little or nothing" about opera.<sup>52</sup> After Bunyan's inevitable and humiliating defeat, Auden must surely have realized that writing a libretto was a matter very different from writing a play and that it required a technique with which he was not as yet conversant. This, incidentally, probably accounts in large part for why Auden, in the articles he wrote on libretto-writing after The Rake, devoted a considerable proportion of his time to a discussion of the differences between writing a libretto and writing an ordinary spoken play. It is no wonder, then, that Auden was so willing to accept Stravinsky's direction in the choice of subject-matter and form and so ready to submit to his programme for a libretto based upon the easily-accessible conventions of the classical opera.

There can be no doubt, however, that Auden would never have so readily accepted Stravinsky's idea for a libretto based upon the highly artificial

conventions of classical opera with its arias and recitatives if his own theories of art had not already predisposed him in this direction. And sure enough, in his long poem "New Year Letter, January 1, 1940," we see that Auden had indeed already expressed a belief in art as artifice highly compatible with Stravinsky's own:

Art in intention is mimesis  
 But, realised, the resemblance ceases;  
 Art is not life and cannot be  
 A midwife to society.  
 For art is a fait accompli.  
 What they should do, or how or when  
 Life-order comes to living men  
 It cannot say, for it presents  
 Already lived experience  
 Through a convention that creates  
 Autonomous completed states.  
 . . . . .  
 The unique serves to typify,  
 Becomes, though still particular,  
 An algebraic formula,  
 An abstract model of events  
 Derived from dead experiments, . . . .53

Perhaps it was their similar ideas on the nature of art to which Stravinsky referred when he said that "as soon as we began to work together I discovered that we shared the same views . . . on the nature of the Beautiful and the Good."<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, it was still Auden's contact with Stravinsky that crystallized his ideas about what convention meant when applied to the libretto-form in particular. It is significant in this context to note that all of Auden's articles on his theory of opera appeared after The Rake and reiterated the lessons he had learnt from his experience with Stravinsky. In addition, contrary to the over-all twentieth-century trend in libretto-writing but consistent with Stravinsky's ideas, all of Auden's libretti classify as "operas" as opposed to "music dramas."

Thus, as the work which both culminated Stravinsky's operatic career

and initiated Auden's anew, The Rake's Progress was the vehicle whereby the one man passed his ideas, theories and inspirations on to another, with the most fruitful and unexpected of results. That Auden should have been so well prepared both by his own aesthetic inclinations and by, in particular, his own previous librettistic experience to be not only receptive to Stravinsky's ideas but also so well-suited to take them to so rewarding a conclusion was certainly one of the most fortuitous coincidences in the history of the libretto.

Although a few literary critics have already recognized that The Rake's Progress occupies a legitimate place in Auden's literary canon, it is still the prevailing tendency to speak of a libretto as if it belongs to the composer who, more often than not, has done no more than set it to music. And this is definitely not a mistake that will be repeated here, in spite of the fact that we have had to admit that in this case Stravinsky had a considerable influence over The Rake even before it was written. By inducing Auden to write the libretto to a Nummernoper composed of set arias, recitatives and ensemble numbers, Stravinsky did tap Auden's talent for writing short, lyrical pieces and did introduce him to a set of conventions which turned out to be most congenial to his poetic and dramatic gifts. And it is also true that as a result, The Rake is, in striking contrast to Paul Bunyan, what Joseph Kerman has succinctly described as "direct, economical, well-shaped and undeflected by secondary material."<sup>55</sup> But even though Stravinsky made the initial suggestions, the responsibility for the actual writing was Auden's alone and inevitably The Rake became the vehicle for many ideas and themes which Stravinsky could never have foreseen. The initial plot-line which Stravinsky and Auden formulated together is, it is true, substantially the same as that

of the completed libretto but even the most cursory glance at the two side-by-side reveals how much Auden succeeded in making out of so little. And as far as Auden's statement to the effect that "a libretto is addressed only to the composer" is concerned, it must be said that in actual practice Auden was too much to an artist not to address his libretto to issues far wider than this, as we shall presently see.

Before turning to The Rake itself, it should be noted that even the manner in which Auden went about writing his libretto was consistent with librettistic convention. That is to say, he asked his friend, the American poet Chester Kallman, to be his co-librettist. This curious phenomenon of co-authoring a libretto was particularly endemic in the nineteenth century; the above-mentioned team of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré (Faust) was typical of this trend as was the famous duo of Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa (La Bohème, Madame Butterfly, Tosca). Often, this practice would go to ridiculous lengths and in its most extreme form amounted to collective libretto-writing. Five librettists--Domenico Oliva, Marco Praga, Giulio Ricardi, Illica and Giacosa--, plus Puccini wrote the libretto Manon Lescaut (1893) and composer Virgil Thomson maintains that twelve had a hand in writing Louise (1900) for Charpentier!<sup>56</sup> Even our Capriccio (1942) seems to have been the result of a collective; Clemens Krauss receives the credit but contributions to it were also made by Richard Strauss, Joseph Gregor,<sup>3</sup> Stefan Zweig, Hans Swarowsky and Rudolf Hartmann.<sup>57</sup>

The Rake's Progress is, fortunately, far from being so extreme a case. Although Auden's secretary Alan Ansen has attributed almost half of the finished product to Kallman,<sup>58</sup> it was Auden who exercised the controlling vision and so The Rake can be justifiably considered



to be primarily the result of Auden's efforts. Certainly, there can be no doubt which of the two poets played the dominant role; judging on the basis of Kallman's own publications-- Storm at Castelfranco (1956), Absent and Present (1963) and The Sense of Occasion (1971)--, one cannot help but concur with critic Spears that "Kallman's poetry is much like Auden's and sometimes bears the mark of obvious derivation; this is to be expected . . . ." <sup>59</sup>

After The Rake, Auden and Kallman collaborated on several projects, including the writing of three more libretti, the editing of the Elizabethan Song Book (1957) and the translation of Don Giovanni, The Magic Flute and Brecht's ballet cantata, Die sieben Todsünden. In the article "Translating Opera Libretti," Auden later called all of these collaborations the work of a "corporate personality" and discouraged "arrogant and stupid reviewers" from trying to disentangle who wrote what. <sup>60</sup> In view of this, critic Blair has made the following comment:

To separate their individual contributions is ultimately impossible because their joint efforts have produced a cohesive work of art as end product. . . . the authorship of particular passages is essentially irrelevant. The Auden-Kallman Rake's Progress as it stands is, . . . both poetic and dramatic. Analysis can show how its plan and many devices of its execution are exemplary of Auden's work as a whole. <sup>61</sup>

This attitude is the one underlying the present study as well.

Opera, wrote Auden, is "pure artifice" and is for this reason "the ideal medium for a tragic myth." <sup>62</sup> This definition, expressed within a year of The Rake's debut and composed of two ideas, the one acquired from Stravinsky, the second retained since Paul Bunyan, was the controlling thought behind Auden's writing of The Rake's Progress. Noting that Hogarth's narrative of the unrepentant rake lacked "mythical resonance,"

Auden sought to make the hero of his operatic "Progress" "an embodiment of Everyman" and his libretto "a mixture of fairy-story and medieval morality play."<sup>63</sup> In order to accomplish this, Auden took Hogarth's story in its bare outlines and imposed upon it the story and the theme of Faust, a legend which, as we have already seen, had been the mainstay of many librettistic plots and which had the advantage of all the mythical, medieval and moral overtones for which Auden was seeking. Thus, as Faust is accompanied by his Mephistopheles, so Auden's Tom Rakewell is accompanied by his servant, Nick Shadow. It is interesting to note that the name "Shadow" may have been suggested by the writings of Carl Jung in whose works Auden was reading widely at this time:

I have called the inferior and less commendable part of a person the shadow. We have met with this figure in literature; for instance, Faust and his shadow Mephistopheles.<sup>64</sup>

But these psychological issues aside, the story of Faust was already so familiar, especially to opera-goers, that it had become almost a convention in itself and so here, as on several other occasions throughout this libretto, Auden deliberately departed from what would ordinarily be expected. Thus, in The Rake, Tom, unlike Faust, does not know from the beginning who Shadow really is. When Tom asks him what wages will suit him, Shadow evasively replies that he will let his master know his fee in a year and day. From this, it is quite obvious what sort of bargain poor Tom has unwittingly made, information which is confirmed when at the end of this first scene Shadow turns to the audience and, in an aside reminiscent of the eighteenth-century melodramas, says, "The PROGRESS OF A RAKE begins."<sup>65</sup> Thus, Auden's use of the Faust theme served two purposes. It gave The Rake an immediate and consistent sense of dramatic direction, something which his earlier

libretto had lacked, and, at the same time, allowed Auden to make departures from the familiar, thereby achieving both humour and dramatic irony.

The scene which most effectively makes use of the contrast between the audience's knowledge of the truth and Tom's gullible innocence is the third scene of Act II where Shadow fools Tom with the "bread machine." This fantastic "baroque" mechanism, which is actually the librettistic equivalent of many of the devices used in the modern theatre of the absurd,<sup>66</sup> supposedly produces bread from broken china. In an elaborate pantomime enacted while Tom is sleeping, Shadow demonstrates the device to the audience, showing them that it is clearly the crudest of fakes. The demonstration over, Tom now awakens and, seeing the machine as the embodiment of the very thing about which he has been dreaming, launches into his impassioned expression of his hope to repent for his rakish past by using the machine as a means of feeding the starving multitudes and of creating a paradise on earth:

Thanks to this excellent device  
Man shall re-enter Paradise  
From which he once was driven.  
Secure from need, the cause of crime,  
The world shall for the second time  
Be similar to Heaven. (p. 21)

Meanwhile, Shadow, in another sardonic aside to the audience, observes that "there's no fantastic lie/You cannot make men swallow if you try" (p. 21).

The irony, the humour and even the mocking reference to the Philemon and Baucis episode of the Second Part of Goethe's Faust are immediately apparent. But what is even more important than these is the skillful way in which Auden has managed to turn what he has called the libretto's affinity for artifice into a vehicle for satire. That Tom should be fooled into believing he can aid suffering humanity with the help of so

transparently false a machine is surely a satiric comment on the impracticality of utopian visions in general.

This interpretation is consistent with the ending of the play which demonstrates the impossibility of ever achieving one's paradise on earth. As in Goethe's version of the Faust theme, Auden's Tom is saved from hell by the "Eternal Feminine" and is assured of salvation:

Glide, little boat  
 . . . . .  
 Glide, glide, glide  
 Toward the Islands of the Blest. (p. 29)

But although Anne's love "can plunder Hell of its prey," (p. 18) she can save Tom from neither insanity nor death and so, in the end, even she must leave him. "In this earthly city we/ Shall not meet again love, yet/ Never think that I forget" (p. 30). Thus, the end of Tom's "progress" is to die alone and insane but with, however, the spiritual realization of the futility and vanity of his hopes for the earthly consummation of any of his desires. As in King Lear, it is not until he is mad that Tom realizes the madness of his former worldly life:

In a foolish dream, in a gloomy labyrinth  
 I hunted shadows, disdaining thy true love;  
 Forgive thy servant, who repents his madness,  
 Forgive Adonis and he shall faithful prove. (p. 29)

It should be pointed out here that Auden's libretto is not the only one to suggest madness as the condition of modern man. Alban Berg's Wozzeck, although in many ways a far more bitter play than Auden's, also comes to the same conclusion.

Thus, Auden's libretto participates to a certain extent in the modern trend of the anti-utopia. This, however, cannot be taken too far, for Auden's satire on man's blind faith in the power of machinery and technology to work miracles is, unlike the full-fledged satire on



man and his machines in Karel Čapek's R.U.R. of Huxley's Brave New World, limited to ridiculing one man's gullible trust in a very silly and artificial contraption. All the same, Tom's misplaced faith in the bread machine does lead, as we see in the auction scene which follows, to not only his own downfall but to the ruin of many other innocent people besides; Auden's work is not so remote from the larger literary trends of our "age of anxiety" as it might at first appear.

But the satire in this scene is most directly aimed at the unscrupulous practices of big business and mass advertising. Shadow contemptuously ignores Tom's noble impulses and points out that dreams are all very well, but one must first of all manufacture and sell one's merchandise before one can make a fortune:

So, you who know your proper interest,  
Here is your golden chance. Invest. Invest.  
Come, take your shares immediately, my friends,  
And praise the folly that pays dividends.

Forgive me, master, for intruding upon your transports; but your dream is still a long way from fulfillment. Here is the machine, it is true. But it must be manufactured in great quantities. It must be advertized, it must be sold. We shall need money and advice. We shall need partners, merchants of probity and reputation in the City. (p. 23)

This same tone is continued in the auction scene which follows. Here, we see Auden making very effective use of the librettistic convention of the chorus which in this scene represents the "Crowd of Respectable Citizens." They mill around Tom's expropriated goods rejoicing that "a thousand lose that a thousand may gain," (p. 24) hoping to find some trinket which "may be salvation" (p. 25) and gullibly responding to Sellem the auctioneer who glibly disposes of such useless items as a stuffed auk and a mounted fish as if they were objects of the greatest value. The Crowd is shown to be susceptible not only to Sellem's hard

sell, but also to rumour, gossip and suggestion generally:

When Anne asks for news of Tom, the Crowd responds with some wild rumors and indicates its indifference to the real Tom by dismissing him with a few labels: "He's a Methodist!" "He's a Papist!"<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the Brechtian vein which we noted in Auden's Paul Bunyan has found its way into this libretto as well.

Just as Auden had satirized Hollywood movie stars in Paul Bunyan, so he satirizes the theatre here, too. This is done primarily through the figure of Baba the Turk. When she first makes her appearance on stage, all her movements and gestures are in "the practiced manner of a great artiste" (p. 20) and so awesome is her presence that adoring crowds of fans flock to see her and "brave warriors who never flinched at the sound of musketry have swooned after a mere glimpse of her" (p. 17). But at home, she is revealed to be the perfect caricature of the commonplace and the trivial, as here, in her chattering breakfast-talk about her many admirers and the many gifts they have given her:

As I was saying, both brothers wore mustaches,  
But Sir John was taller; they gave me the musical glasses.  
That was in Vienna, no, it must have been Milan  
Because of the donkeys. Vienna was the Chinese fan

.....  
The snuff boxes came from Paris, and the fluminous gravels  
From a cardinal who admired me vastly in Rome.  
You're not eating, my love. Count Moldau gave me the gnome,  
And Prince Obolowsky the little statues of the Twelve Apostles,  
Which I like best of all my treasures except my fossils.  
Which reminds me I must tell Bridget never to touch the mummies.  
I'll dust them myself. ....

My love, what's the matter,  
Why don't you talk? (p. 20)

As Kerman has noted, "it is hard to know what is more dreadful, her ceaseless chatter, her tantrum, or her saccharine little love song."<sup>69</sup>

Yet, as in all parodies of Show Business, Baba has the inevitable heart of gold; it is she who in the end convinces Anne to remain true to Tom and who leaves the stage with the greatest dignity, although even

her last majestic line is tinged with a note of conceit and mercenary greed: "The next time you see Baba you shall pay" (p. 26).

But Baba fulfills several important functions in The Rake, not the least of them being the task of pointing out in the Epilogue that all men "say or do is theater" (p. 30). Contrary to Colin Mason's statement that "Baba is the main weakness of the libretto,"<sup>70</sup> she is, in fact, one of its main strengths. Not only is she interesting in her own right, but she "functions dramatically in effectively hindering the reunion of Tom and Anne" too soon in the action and is one of the main sources of the libretto's humour.<sup>71</sup> But even more significant than this, is the role she plays in Auden's satire on the "false" existentialism of Sartre.

As opposed to what he called the "fashionably modern" atheistic existentialism of writers such as Gide, Camus and Sartre,<sup>72</sup> Auden was an exponent of the Christian existentialism of, in particular, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard whose influence had, in fact, "been fundamental and pervasive in Auden's thought since 1940."<sup>73</sup> The "absurdities" of The Rake's Progress, such as the bread machine, the bearded lady and the game of cards in a graveyard, are not quite as far-fetched as they might at first appear when we realize that Auden has used them in order to expose what he sees as the fundamental differences between these two branches of existentialist thought, the atheistic and the Christian.

Tom's decision to marry Baba the Turk is based upon no more than pure willfulness and thus is an example of what Auden understood to be the "false" or atheistic absurd. In a letter to Stravinsky, he called it an "acte gratuit" of the sort described by Sartre.<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, it is the devil who incites Tom in the direction of this false existentialism. Telling him that he must abandon the dictates of both Nature and his

conscience, Shadow suggests to Tom that he must now learn how to act "freely:"

. . . Come, master, observe the host of mankind. How are they? Wretched. Why? Because they are not free. Why? Because the giddy multitude are driven by the unpredictable Must of their pleasures and the sober few are bound by the inflexible Ought of their duty, between which slaveries there is nothing to choose. Would you be happy? Then learn to act freely. Would you act freely? Then learn to ignore those twin tyrants of appetite and conscience. Therefore I counsel you, master--take Baba the Turk to wife. . . . (p. 18)

But because Tom has based his decision to marry solely on the vain desire to become notorious for his willfulness, his marriage is doomed to failure. Baba's beard serves to visually emphasize the absurdity and falseness of this sort of "free act."

In opposition to this, Auden later presents an example of the "true" -absurd, of, in other words, a Kierkegaardian "leap" of pure faith. Writing in his Introduction to The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard, a book which Auden edited in 1952, but one year after The Rake's first performance, Auden explained what he understood by the Kierkegaardian "leap:"

Pascal's "wager" and Kierkegaard's "leap" are neither of them quite adequate descriptions, for the one suggests prudent calculation and the other perverse arbitrariness. Both, however, have some value the first calls men's attention to the fact that in all other spheres of life they are constantly acting on faith and quite willingly; the second reminds them that they cannot live without faith in something, and that when the faith which they have breaks down, when the ground crumbles under their feet, they have to leap even into uncertainty if they are to avoid certain destruction.<sup>75</sup>

The latter part of this quotation describes precisely the situation in the graveyard scene of Act III where the fate of Tom's soul is staked on a game of cards. Having correctly guessed the devil's first two cards, Tom now has only one chance left in which to save his soul. But



Shadow, a sly satan to the end, decides to trick Tom by putting the first card guessed back into the pack:

The simpler the trick, the simpler the deceit;  
That there is no return, I've taught him well,  
And repetition palls him:

The Queen of Hearts again shall be for him the Queen of Hell. (p. 28)

But at this point, Tom hears Anne's voice singing off-stage and inspired by her love, he returns to the one card he knows has already been pulled and, in total defiance of the laws of reason and commonsense, cries, "Renew my life, O Queen of Hearts, again" (p. 28).

This decision, no matter how irrational or "absurd" it may appear, proves to be Tom's salvation. As an act of pure faith, taken "to avoid certain destruction," it is, a genuine Kierkegaardian "leap into uncertainty." Thus, Tom's last wish, as opposed to his earlier acte gratuit, is a dramatic presentation of the "true" absurd of Christian existentialism as Auden understood it.

Unlike in Paul Bunyan, then, in The Rake's Progress Auden has managed to integrate the libretto's affinity for artifice and fantastic devices not only into his plot but into the fundamental satiric and philosophical message of the libretto as well. That Auden has achieved so much with such economy and all within the bounds of the conventions of the Nummernoper is certainly one of his most remarkable accomplishments.

Despite the fact that Tom has been saved from the ravages of hell, the devil will have his revenge. Taking Tom's Kierkegaardian renunciation of reason to its most extreme, the devil curses Tom with insanity. Thus, in this libretto, as in Thomas Mann's modern version of the Faust story, Tom, though saved, dies mad.

Although this is the end of Tom's story, it is not the end of the

libretto for Auden has appended an epilogue. Here, in a clear demonstration of affinity with such libretti of the livret à thèse tradition as Da Ponte's Don Giovanni and Brecht's Threepenny Opera, all the players come forward and announce the "moral" of the tale:

This proverb has proved true  
 Since Eve went out with Adam:  
     For idle hands  
     And hearts and minds  
     The Devil finds  
     A work to do,  
 A work, dear Sir, fair Madam,  
     For you and you. (p. 30)

Many critics have expressed dissatisfaction with this scene saying, as, for instance, Kerman does, that "it is vain for the Epilogue to nervously mock moralizing."<sup>76</sup> It is not moralizing, however, which Auden mocks here but theatrical conventions in general. By having the entire cast-- "the men without their wigs, Baba without her beard" (p. 30)--, come forward and explain what they have been doing, Auden is shattering all artistic illusions and is reminding us that all we have seen and heard is, as Baba says, only theatre. In other words, Auden is reiterating in theatrical terms his idea that opera, and, indeed, all art, is not reality but merely "pure artifice." To quote again from the "New Year Letter:"

Art in intention is mimesis  
 But, realised, the resemblance ceases;  
 Art is not life . . .

Such an ending is entirely appropriate to a libretto which has been ruled so much by convention and is, in fact, one of the play's finest ironies.

Having demonstrated how Auden used the artifice of convention for the purposes of satire and as a means of discussing various philosophical, religious and aesthetic issues, it must now be briefly noted how Auden used convention on the purely verbal level.

In the same article from which the above-mentioned definition was taken, Auden calls the ensemble "the crowning glory of opera."<sup>77</sup> In The Rake, he has written verses which certainly do justice to the dramatic possibilities of such ensemble scenes. At the end of each ensemble part, for instance, Auden will often use the same word but with a slightly different meaning. Thus, in the trio sung after Anne discovers Tom has married Baba, all three parts lead, each by a different path, to the same word "forever." Even more ingenious is the way Auden has used rhyme to create irony. The following quartet from Act I is especially striking in this respect:

Rakewell

Be thanked, and as my Fortune and my guide,  
Remain, confirm, deny.

Shadow

Be thanked, for masterless should I abide  
Too long, I soon would die.

Anne

Be thanked, O God, for him, and may a bride  
Soon to his vows reply.

Truelove

Be thanked, O God, and curb in him all pride,  
That Anne may never sigh. (p. 12)

In keeping with librettistic convention, Auden has kept his lines short and his imagery concise and clear yet dynamic and evocative. This is particularly true of the ballads sung by the whores and roaring boys in the brothel scene where the lyrics have the pithy quality reminiscent of the folk-song at its best. The song "Lanterloo, my lady" is the one which Stravinsky singled out for special praise:

The sun is bright, the grass is green:  
Lanterloo, lanterloo.  
The King is courting his young Queen.  
Lanterloo, my lady.

They go a-walking. What do they see?  
An almanac in a walnut tree.

They go a-riding. Whom do they meet?  
Three scarecrows and a pair of feet.

What will she do when they sit at a table?  
Eat as much as she is able.

What will he do when they lie in bed?  
Lanterloo, lanterloo.  
Draw his sword and chop off her head.  
Lanterloo, my lady. (p. 16)

This ballad-like tone is deceptive, however; this song, though deliberately surreal, is not so "absurd" as it might at first appear. With admirable economy of means, Auden has been careful throughout The Rake to write nothing that does not in some way refer to the whole. This song, for instance, can be read as a summary of the entire play; the King here is, of course, Shadow who is courting Tom for his soul. (In that it is an outline of what is to come, it is also a warning to Tom, a warning, needless to say, which he does not heed). The almanac is a reference to what has just taken place; as an allusion to time (it also has certain cabbalistic associations), it recalls Shadow's turning back of the brothel's clock. The image of the scarecrow evokes the circus freak Baba the Turk and the pair of feet, Tom's eventual reaction to her incessant chatter. The idea of being able to eat as much as one is able is, of course, a reference to Tom's bread machine and the very last stanza foreshadows his eventual end, his loss of reason and death.

Thus, Auden's verse, like all good poetry, is only seemingly simple and conceals much that is of deeper import. And perhaps this was Auden's greatest contribution to the libretto form for, as we can see from the way in which he skillfully integrated the various elements of anti-utopianism, Christian existentialism, and Brechtian social and theatrical satire into his plot, Auden, like Beaumarchais, also believed the libretto capable of supporting the most serious philosophical



speculations. It is a fact to be continually borne in mind while reading Auden's libretti that he believed the libretto to be the only literary form left in which the modern poet could write in the "High or Sublime Style:"

. . . opera is the only art-form involving words which can still employ the High or Sublime Style. In days gone by, the poet could write in a High Style all by himself. This seems to be no longer possible. The characteristic style of modern poetry, or of the modern poetry I admire, is what Professor C.S. Lewis has termed Good Drab. It is a quiet intimate tone of voice, the speech of one person addressing one person, not a large audience: whenever a modern poet raises his voice, he seems phoney, like a man wearing elevator shoes. . . . But the opera still exists as a viable art; in opera people sing, and to sing means precisely "to raise one's voice". A poet like myself who has preserved a love of the High Style, sees in opera an opportunity to make his contribution, . . . provided he will take the trouble to understand his medium and is lucky enough to find a composer in whom he has full confidence.<sup>78</sup>

Although this discussion of Auden's Rake has been necessarily brief and by no means an exhaustive analysis of the many themes and issues raised here, nonetheless it is hoped that the very introductory nature of this study will itself serve to suggest the wealth of the unexplored material that has yet to be investigated. In other words, to those who "take the trouble to understand the medium," both this libretto and the libretto in general will prove themselves to be richly worth the effort.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION:

- <sup>1</sup> Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Théâtre complet de Beaumarchais, ed., René d'Hermies (Paris: Magnard, 1952), 132.
- <sup>2</sup> Boris de Schloezer in André Boll, L'Opéra: Spectacle intégral (Paris: Olivier Perrin, 1963), 126.
- <sup>3</sup> George Marek, Opera as Theater (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), vi-vii.
- <sup>4</sup> Benedetto Marcello in R.G. Pauly, "Benedetto Marcello's Satire on Early 18th-Century Opera," Musical Quarterly 34, No. 3 (1948), 376.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 372-3.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 372.
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 267.
- <sup>8</sup> Paul Dukas in Boll, L'Opera: Spectacle intégral, 136.
- <sup>9</sup> Patrick J. Smith, The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), xviii.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., xviii.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., xviii.
- <sup>12</sup> Edward J. Dent, "Un Ballo in Maschera," Music and Letters 33, No.2 (1952), 101.
- <sup>13</sup> Kerman, 21.
- <sup>14</sup> For the experience of a librettist who tried to write an entirely new libretto to music by Purcell see Ronald Duncan, "The Problems of a

Librettist: Is Opera Emotionally Immature?" Composer, No. 23 (Spring 1967), p. 7.

- <sup>15</sup> Rudolf Bing in Marek, Opera as Theater, xii.

#### CHAPTER ONE:

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Nettl in Ulrich Weisstein, The Essence of Opera (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), vii.
- <sup>2</sup> Donald J. Grout, A Short History of Opera (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), 37.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles M. Carroll, "Opera's Forgotten Man," The Opera Journal 5, No. 4 (1972), 20.
- <sup>4</sup> François Voltaire in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 76.
- <sup>5</sup> Pietro Metastasio in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 103.
- <sup>6</sup> Grout, 185.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 272.
- <sup>8</sup> Francesco Algarotti in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 68.
- <sup>9</sup> Grout, 272.
- <sup>10</sup> Christoph Gluck in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 106.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 144.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 107.
- <sup>13</sup> Harold Rosenthal and John Warrack, Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 62; 154.
- <sup>14</sup> Patrick J. Smith, The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 143.
- <sup>15</sup> Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Théâtre complet de Beaumarchais, ed., René d'Hermies (Paris: Magnard, 1952), 254.

- 16 Ibid., 255.
- 17 Ibid., 255.
- 18 P.J. Smith, 158.
- 19 Ibid., 180.
- 20 Jean Nicolas Bouilly, Les Deux Journées in P.J. Smith, 190.
- 21 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Conversations with Eckermann in P.J. Smith, 185.
- 22 Christoph Gluck in Calvin S. Brown, Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1948), 92.
- 23 P.J. Smith, 99.
- 24 Grout, 283-4.
- 25 P.J. Smith, 178-9.
- 26 Grout, 316.
- 27 P.J. Smith, 215.
- 28 Richard Wagner in P.J. Smith, 231.
- 29 To Gautier, Scribe symbolized the triumph of mediocre and bourgeois values in the French theater. "His ideas are those of the crowd," and his work shows "the complete absence of any art or literature," wrote Gautier in 1847.  
Later, in 1856, Gautier was to soften his latter view: "M. Scribe, let us be honest, is not our author; that does not prevent us from recognizing his marvellous fecundity, his rare understanding of the state, his extreme skill in handling difficult situations, and finally a continuity of successes which is not obtained without real merit . . . The public cannot be mistaken in its pleasures for forty-five years."  
Théophile Gautier in Joanne Richardson, Théophile Gautier: His Life and Times (New York: Coward-McCann, 1959), 60; 73.
- 30 Edgar Istel, The Art of Writing Opera-Librettos: Practical Suggestions, trans., T. Baker (New York: G. Schirmer, 1922), 100-54.



- 31 For an excellent literary analysis of Les Troyens see John R. Elliott, "Virgil Shakespearianized: Berlioz and The Trojans," London Times Literary Supplement, (October 1969), pp. 1160-1.
- 32 Ernest Newman, "'Faust' in Music," Musical Studies (London: The Bodley Head, 1918), 95.
- 33 Grout, 326.
- 34 Hector Berlioz in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 213.
- 35 Ibid., 212-3.
- 36 Harold Child, "Some Thoughts on Opera Libretto," Music and Letters 2, No. 3 (1921), 248.
- 37 P.J. Smith, 259.
- 38 Richard Wagner, Opera and Drama, trans., Edwin Evans (London: W. Reeves, 1913), II, 634.
- 39 Ibid., 635.
- 40 Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 186-7.
- 41 Charles Hamm, Opera (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1966), 216.
- 42 Ibid., 216.
- 43 Kerman, 180.
- 44 P.J. Smith, 259.
- 45 We are flying clouds from limbo,  
wandering amid sacred splendors.  
We are choirs of children, of cupids.  
Arrigo Boito, Mefistofele (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1959), 8.
- 46 P.J. Smith, 337.
- 47 "Verdi . . . was never really satisfied with the subjects his librettists provided. How long and with what fervor did he seek the literary man who could mediate between him and his adored Shakespeare, but none suited him. Then, in his old age, he found Arrigo Boito, a

kindred soul, with whose help the septuagenarian rose to the pinnacle of drama in music."

Paul Henry Lang, Critic at the Opera (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 135.

Joseph Kerman, too, concedes the power of the librettist, saying: "I would not hesitate to give Boito much credit for the unparalleled dramatic unity of Otello and Falstaff."

Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama, 166.

48 Hamm, 238.

49 P.J. Smith, 317.

50 Ibid., 316.

51 Lawson A. Carter, Zola and the Theater (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 158.

52 Ibid., 202.

53 Emile Zola in Carter, Zola and the Theater, 192.

54 Carter, 184.

55 Emile Zola in Carter, 192.

56 P.J. Smith, 325.

57 Carter, 191.

58 P.J. Smith, 324.

59 Michael Hamburger, ed., Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Selected Plays and Libretti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), xiv.

60 Ibid., xii.

61 Ibid., lv.

62 W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman, Elegy for Young Lovers (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1961), 3.

63 Gian Carlo Menotti, "Notes on Opera as Basic Theater," Perspectives U.S.A. 12 (1955), 7 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Noel Coward in Reinhard G. Pauly, Music and the Theater: An Introduction to Opera (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 424.

<sup>65</sup> P.J. Smith, 385.

<sup>66</sup> Hector Berlioz in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 211.

<sup>67</sup> Douglas Moore, "Something about Librettos," Opera News 25 (September 30, 1961), 12.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>69</sup> Kurt Honolka, Der Musik gehorsame Tochter: Opern, Dichter, Operndichter (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1962), 88.

<sup>70</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann, "The Poet and the Composer," in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 167-8.

<sup>71</sup> Jean Cocteau in Vera Rašin, "Les Six and Jean Cocteau," Music and Letters 38, No. 2 (1957), 165.

<sup>72</sup> For a complete list of the musico-literary projects which Jean Cocteau and the members of Les Six produced together see Vera Rašin, 167-9.

<sup>73</sup> John Willett, The Theater of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions Books, 1959), 126.

<sup>74</sup> Jean Cocteau in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 269.

<sup>75</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, "Cocteau, Stravinsky, Brecht and the Birth of Epic Opera," Modern Drama 5, No. 2 (1962), 150.

<sup>76</sup> Bertolt Brecht in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 339.

<sup>77</sup> Willett, 132.

<sup>78</sup> Weisstein, "Cocteau, Stravinsky, Brecht and the Birth of Epic Opera," 151.  
As Brecht explains in the notes to The Threepenny Opera, the "literarization of the theatre" is a means of introducing the audience to the art of "complex seeing." He writes: "The boards on which the titles of the scenes are projected are a primitive start toward a literarization of the theatre. . . . Literarization means putting across ideas through actions; interspersing the 'performed' with the 'formulated.' . . . In drama,

too, we should introduce footnotes and the practice of thumbing through and checking up. Complex seeing must be practiced." Bertolt Brecht, The Threepenny Opera, trans. Eric Bentley and Desmond Vesey (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), 98-9.

79 For a more detailed account of how Brecht's libretti influenced their musical settings see Willett, "Music," The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, 126-42.

80 Charles M. Carroll, "Opera's Forgotten Man," The Opera Journal 5, No. 4 (1972), 20.

81 Gertrude Stein, Last Operas and Plays (New York: Binehart, 1949), 470.

82 Ibid., x.

83 Ibid., 83.

84 Ulrich Weisstein, "The Libretto as literature," Books Abroad 35 (1961), 16.

## CHAPTER TWO:

1 Joseph Addison, The Spectator (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1876), 27. This citation appears in issue No. 18 (Wednesday, March 21, 1710) which is entitled "History of the Italian Opera." Other issues of interest here include No. 5 "On the Absurdities of the Modern Opera," No. 13 "Conduct of the Lion at the Opera," No. 29 "Italian Recitative - Absurdities of the Opera Dresses," and No. 31 "Project of a New Opera," all written by Addison.

2 Beaumarchais, Théâtre complet de Beaumarchais, ed., René d'Hermies (Paris: Magnard, 1952), 258.

3 Ibid., 257; 261-2.

4 Ibid., 256.

5 John Dryden, The Essays of John Dryden, ed., W.P. Ker (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), I, 278.

6 Ibid., 276-7.

7 Ulrich Weisstein, The Essence of Opera (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 4.



- 8 Stendhal, Life of Rossini, trans. and ed., Richard N. Coe (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), 73-4.
- 9 Ibid., 148.
- 10 Willi Apel, Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 468.
- 11 Richard N. Coe., ed., Life of Rossini, 492.
- 12 Ronald Duncan, "The Problems of a Librettist: Is Opera Emotionally Immature?" Composer, No. 23 (Spring 1967), 7.
- 13 Alex Preminger, ed., Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 152.
- 14 L.N. Tolstoi, "What is Art?" The Complete Works of L.N. Tolstoi (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1927), I, 6.  
 Čto níkogda takix indejcev ne bylo i ne moglo byt' i čto to, čto oni izobražali, ne tol'ko ne poxože na indejcev, no i ni na čto na svete, krome na drugie opery, v etom ne možet byt' nikakogo somnenija; čto tak rečitatívom ne govornjat i kvartetom, stavši v opredelennom resstojanii, maxaja rukami, ne vyražajut čuvstv, čto tak s fol'govymi alebardami, v tufljaks, parami, nigde, krome kak v teatre, ne xodjat, čto níkogda tak ne serdjatsja, tak ne umiljajutsja, tak ne smejuťsja, tak ne plačut i čto níkogo v mire vse eti predstavlenija tronut' ne mogut, v etom ne možet byt' nikakogo somnenija.  
 L.N. Tolstoj, Sobranie sočinenij: Stat'i ob iskusstve i literature, (Moskva: Xudožestvennaja literatura, 1964), XV, 48-9.
- 15 L.N. Tolstoi, "What is Art?" I, 112.  
 The original Russian reads: "... odno iz glavnyx uslovij xudožestvennogo tvorčestva est' polnaja svoboda xudožnika ot vsjakogo roda predvzjatyx trebovanij." L.N. Tolstoj, Sobranie sočinenij, XV, 160.  
 The Soviet critic A. Lunačarskij, too, believed that Tolstoi was mistaken when he chose to ignore the conventions of opera:  
 "... Tolstoi, when he wanted to ridicule the various conventions of the opera, speaks seemingly good-naturedly of the brightly painted men in cardboard armour who, instead of speaking, open their mouths wide and sing, ... Tolstoi is obviously wrong, since he is attempting to attack the conventionality of the theatre in general. It is still an open question as to what is more normal for a person experiencing great exultation, for an outstanding person caught up in great events-- to speak, ... to sing, ... or to dance.  
 A. Lunačarskij, On Literature and Art (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 272.
- 16 Ulrich Weisstein, "The Libretto as Literature," Books Abroad 35 (1961), 17.

- 17 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," English Romantic Writers, ed., David Perkins (New York: Harvourt, Brace and World, 1967), 452.
- 18 Morton Demmery, "The Hybrid Critic," Music and Letters, 37 (April 1956), 128.
- 19 Ibid., 140.
- 20 Ibid., 132.
- 21 Ibid., 130.
- 22 Ibid., 131.
- 23 Friedrich Dürrenmatt, The Visit of the Old Lady, trans. Norman Tucker (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1972), 6.
- 24 Duncan, 7.
- 25 Edgar Istel, The Art of Writing Opera-Librettos: Practical Suggestions, trans., T. Baker (New York: G. Schirmer, 1922), 27-8.
- 26 Christopher Hassall, "Words, Words . . .," Fanfare for Ernest Newman, ed., Herbert Van Thal (London: Arthur Barker, 1955), 109.
- 27 Istel, 26.
- 28 Reinhard G. Pauly, Music and the Theater: An Introduction to Opera (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 11.
- 29 Douglas Moore, "Something about Librettos," Opera News 25 (September 30, 1961), 8.
- 30 Saint-Evremond, "Sur les Operas: A Mr. le Duc de Buckingham," Oeuvres mêlées, ed., Luigi de Nardis (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1966), 369.
- 31 Ibid., 359.
- 32 Francesco Algarotti in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 69.
- 33 Ibid., 72-3.
- 34 E.T.A. Hoffmann, "The Poet and the Composer," in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 172.

- 35 Ibid., 171.
- 36 Eric Crozier, "Composer and Librettist," Composer 18 (January 1966), 4.
- 37 Ibid., 3.
- 38 Richard Strauss, The Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, trans., Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers (London: Collins, 1961), 18.
- 39 Ibid., 18.
- 40 Istel, 33.
- 41 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Correspondence, 168.
- 42 Hoffmann in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 177.
- 43 Hassall, 117.
- 44 Ibid., 117.
- 45 Hofmannsthal, Correspondence, 168.
- 46 Istel, 32.
- 47 Ibid., 35.
- 48 Harold Child, "Some Thoughts on Opera Libretto," Music and Letters 2, No. 3 (1921), 251.
- 49 For a more detailed discussion see Michael Hamburger's introduction to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Selected Plays and Libretti, ed., Michael Hamburger (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), xxv.
- 50 Lilian Foerster Loveday, "A Plan of Action," Opera News (December 15, 1962), 11.
- 51 Arrigo Boito, Otello, trans., Francis Heuffer (London: G. Ricordi), 12-13.
- 52 Hoffmann in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 177.

- 53 Beaumarchais, 261.
- 54 Richard Strauss, "Preface to Intermezzo," in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 297-8; 296.
- 55 Istel, 37.
- 56 D.S. Mirsky, A History of Russian Literature: From the Beginnings to 1900 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 255.
- 57 Yuri Shaporin in Boris Schwarz, Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970 (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 261.
- 58 Kurt Honolka, Der Musik gehorsame Tochter (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1962), 207-18.
- 59 Sacheverell Stiwell, The Thirteenth Caesar and Other Poems (London, 1924), 46 ff. Cited in Calvin S. Brown, Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1948), 40.
- 60 Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," The Renaissance (London: Collins, 1961), 129.
- 61 W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman, The Bassarids (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1966), 62-3.
- 62 Patrick J. Smith, The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), xx.
- 63 Eric Bentley, The Dramatic Event (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 235.
- 64 Hoffmann in Weisstein, The Essence of Opera, 178.
- 65 Bertolt Brecht, The Threepenny Opera, trans., Desmond Vesey and Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 24.

### CHAPTER THREE

- <sup>1</sup> Igor Stravinsky, "Reflections on The Rake," Opera News (February 9, 1953), 8.
- <sup>2</sup> Igor Stravinsky, Themes and Conclusions (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 77.



<sup>3</sup> John G. Blair, The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 184.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Kerman, "Opera à la mode," The Hudson Review 6 (1953-54), 569.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Davies' study cited below, the following articles deserve to be mentioned here:

Jacques Leduc, "Les Ecrits de Stravinsky," Cahiers musicaux 3, No. 16 (1958), 37-43 and Jeremy Noble, "The Self-Exposed Stravinsky." Music and Musicians 10 (1961-62), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Laurence Davies, "Stravinsky as Littérateur," Paths to Modern Music (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 243.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Davies, 244.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>9</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann, "The Poet and the Composer" in Ulrich Weisstein, ed., The Essence of Opera (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 168.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, Souvenirs sur Igor Stravinsky in Weisstein, ed., The Essence of Opera, 280.

<sup>11</sup> See U. Weisstein's excellent article, "Cocteau, Stravinsky, Brecht and The Epic Opera," Modern Drama 5, No. 2 (1962), 142-53.

<sup>12</sup> Igor Stravinsky, An Autobiography (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 125-6.

<sup>14</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Dialogues and A Diary (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Doubleday, 1963), 22.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that Stravinsky's life-long tendency to rely on others in his literary, as opposed to his musical, projects (even his Autobiography and The Poetics of Music, he later revealed, were written with the help of ghost writers), has recently led to considerable controversy over the authenticity of the opinions attributed to him, particularly in those later books which he co-authored with Robert Craft. For a study of this problem see: P.J. Smith, "Who Really Wrote Stravinsky's Prose?" High Fidelity/Musical America 22 (November 1972), 50-6.

<sup>16</sup> Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons, trans., Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), 75.

- 17 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," The Great Critics: An Anthology of Literary Criticism, James H. Smith and Edd W. Parks, eds., (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), 714-5.
- 18 Stravinsky, Poetics of Music, 75.
- 19 Ibid., 81.
- 20 Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, "A Quintet of Dialogues," Perspectives of New Music No. 1 (1962), 9.
- 21 Stravinsky, Autobiography, 131-2.
- 22 Stravinsky, "Reflections on The Rake," 8.
- 23 Stravinsky, Poetics of Music, 79.
- 24 Ibid., 83.
- 25 Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Memories and Commentaries (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 154.
- 26 W.H. Auden, "The Mythical World of Opera," The (London) Times Literary Supplement, (November 2, 1967), 1038.
- 27 Stravinsky, Memories and Commentaries, 154.
- 28 W.H. Auden, "The Mythical World of Opera," 1038.
- 29 Frederick Antal, Hogarth and His Place in European Art (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 104-5. Quoted in J.R. Turner, "Stravinsky, Hogarth and The Rake's Progress," Your Musical Cue 5, No. 4 (1969), 5.
- 30 See Innes and Gustav Herden, trans., Lichtenberg's Commentaries on Hogarth's Engravings (London: Cresset, 1966), 187-271.
- 31 Walter Pater, The Renaissance (London: Collins, 1961), 129.
- 32 Paul Verlaine, "Art poétique," Oeuvres poétiques (Paris: Garnier, 1969), 261-2.
- 33 Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 297.

34 For an excellent discussion of this in relation to modern German literature, see Walter H. Sokel, "Music and Existence." The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 24-54.

35 W.H. Auden in Stravinsky, Memories and Commentaries, 155.

36 For an account of this see Memories and Commentaries, 156-7.

37 W.H. Auden, Secondary Worlds (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 98-9.

38 W.H. Auden, "The Mythical World of Opera," 1038.

39 Although Auden later preserved three songs from Paul Bunyan-- "Carry her over the water" (later set by Lennox Berkeley), "'Gold in the North,' came the blizzard to say," and "The single creature leads a partial life,"-- in his Collected Poetry, Paul Bunyan is, unfortunately, still unavailable in its entirety. This analysis of Paul Bunyan given here is, therefore, by necessity based upon the secondary sources cited below. Although I regret that this should be the case, it must be pointed out that for the purposes of the thesis presented here, the fact that Auden withdrew Paul Bunyan, repudiated it and did not write another until The Rake speaks for itself.

40 John G. Blair, 155.

41 W.H. Auden, Secondary Worlds, 95.

42 W.H. Auden, "Opera on an American Legend," New York Times (May 4, 1941). Quoted in Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W.H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 266.

43 Quoted and summarized in Spears, 266.

44 Stravinsky, Memories and Commentaries, 156-7.

45 W.H. Auden, "Some Reflections on Music and Opera," Partisan Review 19 (1952), 17.

46 Stravinsky, Themes and Conclusions, 60.

47 Daniel G. Hoffman, Paul Bunyan: Last of the Frontier Demigods (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952), 146.

48 W.H. Auden quoted in Spears, 268.

- 49 Daniel G. Hoffman, 151.
- 50 Ibid., 152.
- 51 Robert A. Simon quoted in Spears, 268.
- 52 Auden quoted in Spears, 271.
- 53 W.H. Auden, The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden (New York: Random House, 1967), 267.
- 54 Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, Themes and Episodes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 97.
- 55 Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 238.
- 56 Patrick J. Smith, The Tenth Muse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 292.
- 57 Ibid., 292.

58 Ansen gives the following break-down:

|         |           |                   |         |
|---------|-----------|-------------------|---------|
| Act I   | Scene i   | first half        | Auden   |
|         |           | second half       | Kallman |
|         | Scene ii  |                   | Auden   |
| Act II  | Scene iii |                   | Kallman |
|         |           |                   | Kallman |
|         | Scene i   | first half        | Kallman |
|         |           | second half       | Auden   |
|         |           |                   | Kallman |
|         | Scene ii  |                   | Kallman |
| Act III | Scene iii |                   | Auden   |
|         |           |                   | Kallman |
|         | Scene i   |                   | Kallman |
|         | Scene ii  | beginning and end | Auden   |
|         |           | recitativo secco  | Kallman |
|         | Scene iii |                   | Auden   |

Alan Ansen, "A Communication," The Hudson Review 9, No. 2 (Summer 1956), 319-20.

- 59 Spears, 271.
- 60 W.H. Auden, "Translating Opera Libretti," The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays (New York: Random House, 1962), 483.
- 61 Blair, 154-5.
- 62 Auden, "Some Reflections on Music and Opera," 13.



- 63 Auden, Secondary Worlds, 99.
- 64 Carl Jung, The Integration of the Personality (1940), 20. Quoted in John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W.H. Auden (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 207.
- 65 Because The Rake's Progress, unlike the libretti which Auden wrote for Hans Werner Henze, has not yet been published in separate book-form and is still generally available only with the musical scores, all the quotations from The Rake given here are taken from the Columbia Records reprint of the libretto as it appears in W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman, The Rake's Progress (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1951).
- 66 For fantastically absurd stage devices very similar to Auden's, see the plays of the Polish playwright of the absurd, S.I. Witkiewicz. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, The Madman and the Nun (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968).
- 67 For an interesting comparison of Wozzeck with The Rake, see Kerman, Opera as Drama, 219-249.
- 68 George McFadden, "The Rake's Progress: A Note on the Libretto," The Hudson Review 8, No. 1 (Spring 1955), 111.
- 69 Kerman, Opera as Drama, 240.
- 70 Colin Mason, "Stravinsky's Opera," Music and Letters 33, No. 1 (January 1952), 2.
- 71 Spears, 277.
- 72 Auden, Secondary Worlds, 100.
- 73 Spears, 180.
- 74 Auden quoted in Memories and Commentaries, 161.
- 75 W.H. Auden, ed., The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard (New York: David McKay; London: Cassell, 1953), 17-18.
- 76 Kerman, "Opera à la mode," 563.
- 77 Auden, "Some Reflections on Music and Opera," 15.
- 78 W.H. Auden, Words and Notes (Salzburg: Festungsverlag, 1968), 37.

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TABLE I

The Major Original Libretti of the Twentieth Century  
including word-for-word settings \*

| <u>Librettist</u>     | <u>Libretto</u>                                                                                                                                               | <u>Composer</u>                                                                                             | <u>Date</u>                                  |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Guillaume Apollinaire | <u>Les Mamelles de Tirésias</u>                                                                                                                               | Francis Poulenc                                                                                             | 1944                                         |
| W.H. Auden            | Paul Bunyan<br><u>The Rake's Progress</u><br><u>Delia, or A Masque of Night</u><br><u>Elegy for Young Lovers</u><br><u>The Bassarids</u><br><u>Moralities</u> | Benjamin Britten<br>Igor Stravinsky<br>unset<br>Hans Werner Henze<br>Hans Werner Henze<br>Hans Werner Henze | 1941<br>1951<br>1953<br>1960<br>1966<br>1967 |
| Bela Balász           | <u>Bluebeard's Castle</u>                                                                                                                                     | Béla Bartók                                                                                                 | 1918                                         |
| Bertolt Brecht        | <u>The Threepenny Opera</u><br><u>Happy End</u><br><u>Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny</u><br><u>Der Jasager</u><br><u>Das Verhör der Lukullus</u>       | Kurt Weill<br>Kurt Weill<br>Kurt Weill<br>Kurt Weill<br>Paul Dessau                                         | 1928<br>1929<br>1930<br>1930<br>1951         |
| Georg Büchner         | <u>Wozzeck*</u>                                                                                                                                               | Alban Berg                                                                                                  | 1925                                         |
| Ferruccio Busoni      | Arlecchino<br><u>Doktor Faustus</u>                                                                                                                           | Ferruccio Busoni<br>Ferruccio Busoni                                                                        | 1917<br>1925                                 |
| Michel Butor          | <u>Votre Faust</u>                                                                                                                                            | Henri Pousseur                                                                                              | 1969                                         |

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                |                                                      |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Paul Claudel          | <u>Christophe Colomb</u><br><u>Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher</u>                                                                                                                    | Darius Milhaud<br>Arthur Honegger                                                                                              | 1930<br>1936                                         |
| Jean Cocteau          | <u>Antigone</u><br><u>Oedipus Rex</u><br><u>Le pauvre Matelot</u><br><u>La Voix humaine</u>                                                                                  | Arthur Honegger<br>Igor Stravinsky<br>Darius Milhaud<br>Francis Poulenc                                                        | 1927<br>1927<br>1927<br>1958                         |
| Colette               | <u>L'Enfant et les Sortilèges</u>                                                                                                                                            | Maurice Ravel                                                                                                                  | 1925                                                 |
| Eric Crozier          | <u>Let's Make an Opera</u>                                                                                                                                                   | Benjamin Britten                                                                                                               | 1949                                                 |
| Gabriele D'Annunzio   | <u>Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien</u><br><u>Parisina</u><br><u>Fedra</u><br><u>La Figlia di Jorio*</u>                                                                        | Claude Debussy<br>Pietro Mascagni<br>Ildebrando Pizzetti<br>Ildebrando Pizzetti                                                | 1912<br>1913<br>1915<br>1954                         |
| Friedrich Dürrenmatt  | <u>The Visit of the Old Lady</u>                                                                                                                                             | Gottfried von Einem                                                                                                            | 1970                                                 |
| André Gide            | <u>Perséphone</u>                                                                                                                                                            | Igor Stravinsky                                                                                                                | 1934                                                 |
| Joseph Gregor         | <u>Friedenstag</u><br><u>Daphne</u><br><u>Die Liebe der Danae</u>                                                                                                            | Richard Strauss<br>Richard Strauss<br>Richard Strauss                                                                          | 1938<br>1938<br>1940                                 |
| Hugo von Hofmannsthal | <u>Elektra</u><br><u>Der Rosenkavalier</u><br><u>Ariadne auf Naxos</u><br><u>Die Frau ohne Schatten</u><br><u>Akestis</u><br><u>Die ägyptische Helene</u><br><u>Arabella</u> | Richard Strauss<br>Richard Strauss<br>Richard Strauss<br>Richard Strauss<br>Egon Wellesz<br>Richard Strauss<br>Richard Strauss | 1909<br>1911<br>1912<br>1919<br>1924<br>1928<br>1933 |
| Chester Kallman       | <u>The Tuscan Players</u>                                                                                                                                                    | Carlos Chavez                                                                                                                  |                                                      |

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                              |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Oscar Kokoschka         | <u>Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Paul Hindemith                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1921                                                         |
| Clemens Krauss          | <u>Capriccio</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Richard Strauss                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1942                                                         |
| Ernst Křenek            | <u>Jonny spielt auf</u><br><u>Das Leben des Orest</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Ernst Křenek<br>Ernst Křenek                                                                                                                                                                       | 1927<br>1930                                                 |
| Maurice Maeterlinck     | <u>Pelléas et Mélisande</u><br><u>Ariane et Barbe-bleue</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Claude Debussy<br>Paul Dukas                                                                                                                                                                       | 1902<br>1907                                                 |
| Gian Carlo Menotti      | <u>The Medium</u><br><u>The Telephone</u><br><u>The Consul</u><br><u>Amahl and the Night Visitors</u><br><u>The Saint of Bleeker Street</u><br><u>The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore</u><br><u>The Last Savage</u><br><u>Help! Help! the Globolinks!</u> | Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti<br>Gian Carlo Menotti | 1946<br>1947<br>1950<br>1951<br>1954<br>1956<br>1963<br>1968 |
| Edna St. Vincent Millay | <u>The King's Henchman</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Deems Taylor                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1927                                                         |
| Luigi Pirandello        | <u>La Favola del figlio cambiato</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Gian F. Malipiero                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1934                                                         |
| Charles F. Ramuz        | <u>L'Histoire du soldat</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Igor Stravinsky                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1918                                                         |
| Arnold Schönberg        | <u>Die glückliche Hand</u><br><u>Moses und Aaron</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Arnold Schönberg<br>Arnold Schönberg                                                                                                                                                               | 1924<br>1954                                                 |
| Gertrude Stein          | <u>Four Saints in Three Acts</u><br><u>The Mother of Us All</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Virgil Thomson<br>Virgil Thomson                                                                                                                                                                   | 1934<br>1947                                                 |
| Richard Strauss         | <u>Intermezzo</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Richard Strauss                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1924                                                         |
| John M. Synge           | <u>Riders to the Sea*</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Ralph Vaughan Williams                                                                                                                                                                             | 1937                                                         |

Oscar Wilde

Emile Zola

Salome\*

Lazare

Messidor

Violaine la Chevelue

L'Ouragan

L'Enfant Roi

Sylvanire ou Paris en amour

Richard Strauss

1905

Alfred Bruneau

1894

Alfred Bruneau

1897

unset

1897

Alfred Bruneau

1901

Alfred Bruneau

1902

unset

1902



TABLE II

The Major Creative Adaptions of the Twentieth Century

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Libretto</u>                     | <u>Librettist</u>           | <u>Source</u>      | <u>Composer</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1904        | <u>Jenůfa</u>                       | Leoš Janáček                | Gabriela Preissová | Janáček         |
| 1912        | <u>Die Brautwahl</u>                | Ferruccio Busoni            | E.T.A. Hoffmann    | Busoni          |
| 1914        | <u>Le Rossignol</u>                 | Igor Stravinsky; S. Mitusov | Hans C. Andersen   | Stravinsky      |
| 1917        | <u>Turandot</u>                     | Ferruccio Busoni            | Carlo Gozzi        | Busoni          |
| 1919        | <u>Love for Three Oranges</u>       | Sergej Prokofiev            | Carlo Gozzi        | Prokofiev       |
| 1921        | <u>Katya Kabanová</u>               | Leoš Janáček                | A.N. Ostrovski     | Janáček         |
| 1926        | <u>Cardillac</u>                    | Ferdinand Lion              | E.T.A. Hoffmann    | Hindemith       |
| 1926        | <u>The Makropoulos Affair</u>       | Leoš Janáček                | Karel Capek        | Janáček         |
| 1929        | <u>The Gambler</u>                  | Sergej Prokofiev            | F.M. Dostoyevsky   | Prokofiev       |
| 1930        | <u>From the House of the Dead</u>   | Leoš Janáček                | F.M. Dostoyevsky   | Janáček         |
| 1930        | <u>The Nose</u>                     | D. Shostakovich; A. Preis   | N.V. Gogol         | Shostakovich    |
| 1934        | <u>Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk</u>      | D. Shostakovich             | N.S. Leskov        | Shostakovich    |
| 1935        | <u>Die schweigsame Frau</u>         | Stephen Zweig               | Ben Jonson         | Strauss         |
| 1937        | <u>Lulu</u>                         | Alban Berg                  | Frank Wedekind     | Berg            |
| 1938        | <u>Peer Gynt</u>                    | Werner Egk                  | Henrik Ibsen       | Egk             |
| 1939        | <u>The Devil and Daniel Webster</u> | Douglas Moore               | Stephen V. Benet   | Moore           |
| 1940        | <u>Volo di Notte</u>                | Luigi Dallapiccola          | A. de St-Exupéry   | Dallapiccola    |
| 1945        | <u>Peter Grimes</u>                 | Montagu Slater              | George Crabbe      | Britten         |
| 1946        | <u>The Rape of Lucretia</u>         | Ronald Duncan               | André Obey; Livy   | Britten         |
| 1947        | <u>Albert Herring</u>               | Eric Crozier                | Guy de Maupassant  | Britten         |
| 1947        | <u>Dantons Tod</u>                  | G. von Einem; Boris Blacher | Georg Büchner      | von Einem       |

|      |                                 |                            |                 |               |
|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1951 | Billy Budd                      | Eric Crozier; E.M. Forster | H. Melville     | Britten       |
| 1951 | <u>The Pilgrim's Progress</u>   | Ralph Vaughan Williams     | John Bunyan     | Williams      |
| 1953 | <u>Der Prozess</u>              | Boris Blacher              | Franz Kafka     | von Einem     |
| 1954 | <u>Irische Legende</u>          | Werner Egk                 | W.B. Yeats      | Egk           |
| 1954 | <u>Troilus and Cressida</u>     | Christopher Hassall        | G. Chaucer      | Walton        |
| 1954 | <u>The Turn of the Screw</u>    | Myfanwy Piper              | Henry James     | Britten       |
| 1955 | <u>War and Peace</u>            | Sergej Prokofiev           | Lev Tolstoj     | Prokofiev     |
| 1956 | <u>König Hirsch</u>             | Heinz von Cramer           | Carlo Gozzi     | Henze         |
| 1957 | <u>A Tale of Two Cities</u>     | Cedric Cliffe              | Charles Dickens | A. Benjamin   |
| 1958 | <u>Murder in the Cathedral</u>  | Alberto Castelli           | T.S. Eliot      | I. Pizzetti   |
| 1961 | <u>Der lange Weihnachtsmahl</u> |                            | Thornton Wilder | Hindemith     |
| 1961 | <u>The Wings of the Dove</u>    | Ethan Ayer                 | Henry James     | D. Moore      |
| 1969 | <u>Under Western Eyes</u>       | Cedric Cliffe              | Joseph Conrad   | J. Joubert    |
| 1970 | <u>The Devil of Loudun</u>      |                            | Aldous Huxley   | K. Penderecki |
| 1973 | <u>Death in Venice</u>          | Myfanwy Piper              | Thomas Mann     | Britten       |